

Things I Can Tell



Seemorerocks

I have taken the title, “What I Can Tell” from a memoir of my ancestor, Lord Rossmore, written in the 1930s.

Seemorerocks is the racing name of my horse, Biscuit.

It is also the nom de plume of myself and the title of my blog that has been going for 12 years,

seemorerocks.is

and

robinwestenra.blogspot.co.nz

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Foreword

A few days ago I listened to an inspiring interview with Pfizer whistle-blower, Dr Mike Yeadon. In it, he described how he lost his mother at 18 months and was first neglected and then abandoned by his father. He describes how this influenced the rest of his life, from being very introverted and developing a deep aversion to bullying behaviour. I resonated with this.

I was never neglected or abandoned like Mike Yeadon. I had very loving and caring parents but they were in their 40s when I arrived on the scene and my brother and sister were 8 and 10 years older respectively.

Clarissa Pinkola Estes, in her book, *Women That Run with the Wolves*, says the following;

"You may not belong to your original family at all. You may match your family genetically, but temperamentally, you belong to another group of people. Or you may belong to your family's family perfunctorily while your soul leaps out, runs down the road and is gluttonously happy munching spiritual cookies somewhere else"

This may be a message for women but I think that may explain much of my earlier life. Perhaps, growing into a more conscious mode of living was about finding my real family?

I spent many of my formative years isolated on a farm and so I had to fall on my own resources for play, with only occasional connections with other children who often lived 5 miles away.

I, therefore, developed a vivid imagination. I studied other countries, drew lots of maps, wrote short stories and set up things like the Danny Kaye fan club or the Dog and Horse Society that had two members - a fairly retarded friend from school and my beloved aunt Barbara. It meant that I always befriended the underdog, people who were less fortunate than myself.

When I was at what is called prep school, between the ages of 10 and 13, I was quite drawn to religion and some of my knowledge of the Bible still comes from then.

A move to a repressive, traditional boy's school killed all that and I soon became a silent rebel and from being drawn to religion I became an atheist and was against anything connected with established religion, simply because it was foisted on us. An example of this sort of adolescent response, when we were compelled to sing hymns in the chapel, was to substitute the word "God" with "Dog". I also became a convinced communist of sorts for the same reason.

In hindsight, it was a sort of quiet rebellion. In part, it was a concern for the underdog, in part, a sort of romanticism that took me away from what I was experiencing at the school that I hate to this day, a reaction to the cloying atmosphere and boredom of life in the early-1970's Christchurch away. It was an escape from the narrowness and boredom of life in 1960s Britain in much the same way that anarchic humour was to those who were

involved in the Monty Python TV series.

You had to be a certain type of conformist to fit in with the society of the day although I have learned to appreciate those times more in hindsight.

My life, almost until I reached the age of 30 was like that. I was pretty miserable and lonely and found solace amongst people who were very different to me and had very little positive to offer me.

I had numerous romantic dalliances with Russian women and ended up marrying Natasha who hailed from Leningrad and was older than me.

More of that later.

Basically, I never thought of the consequences of my actions on others (or, indeed myself) and it was all very self-indulgent and, above all, unconscious. True, I never got into drugs or rock n' roll and I never committed any crimes, but I have a lot to repent. I'm not ashamed because without my past I would not be where I am and might have become stuck in what I was then.

I always had a very close relationship with my mother and I recall how we were able to talk about many things. But it was one of great emotional attachment.

I only started to grow up after my mother died of cancer when I was 27. I recall her telling me of an out-of-body experience she had when she was diagnosed with a secondary brain tumour. She described how while having a brain scan she left her body, and was attracted towards the Light but returned after seeing the helplessness of my father who was moving into dementia.

By contrast, my relationship with my father was emotionally distant. He had his reasons why he was not capable of great emotional intimacy that related to his childhood and the lack of love shown to him by his mother, my grandmother who not only went through the trauma of losing both her sisters in a volcanic eruption in 1903 but must have been incapable of great motherly feelings towards the two surviving sets of twins she gave birth to. I was incapable of taking any of that into account and my father was someone to be quietly rebelled against. I was later able to develop a loving relationship with him and, indeed, was able to be there for him emotionally (as opposed to practically and financially after he was diagnosed with Alzheimer's and taken into care. I had a certain degree of acceptance of his situation that neither my brother nor sister was capable of. By the same token, I was not capable of the practicalities of looking after his Estate and protecting his wealth. That fell to my brother about whom I will have a lot to say later.

About 2 years after my mother died, and after my then-girlfriend, Elena left for Australia I found myself invited to a ceremonial event with the monks of the Buddhist monastery that was then being built. Hearing the abbot, Ajahn Viradhammo speak I felt as if I had come home and so began a long period of spiritual seeking which involved a 16-month trip to Asia to find myself and 10 months of living as a novice in Bodhinyanarama, the Buddhist

monastery here in the Wellington area.

My mother's death at an early age in some ways could be seen in some ways as a kind of rebirth for me. Had she lived longer perhaps I would not have developed in the way I did but perhaps have remained stuck. I have always thought that there was a kind of transmission. Not only was I able to finally grow up but learn to look inwards and foster this inner growth. I went through the acute pain of loss but came out the other side, I believe, a better person. No conventional success in my life; no successful career, no great wealth or bringing up children - the things people use to measure "success". But my life has been a success in other ways. I have transcended a life of unaware self-centeredness to one where I am far more capable of self-reflection and of seeing the world as it really is. Others grow up through careers and bringing up children. I have not experienced that, but I have lived a rich and eventful life and have developed a level of introspection and self-reflection that I do not see frequently in others.

I came together with my "*Significant Other*", Pam, through a shared passion for Buddhism, meditation and yoga. Even though I, at least, have moved on from those things, at least in their original forms we have discovered shared interests, first in tramping (as we call trekking in New Zealand) and then later horse riding. However, it is sharing at a deeper level that has sustained us. We are often on a similar wavelength on many of the things that interest us both. Often, the other has been able to enunciate what the other is thinking. We come from very different backgrounds but there is much more to bring us together than, say, with my own family which, these days, since my own sickness and since the days covid19 appeared in our lives I have had little to do with.

You will find very little of my work life, such as it was - the various jobs I had in my student years, several years working as a clerk / "assistant advisory officer", a couple of years as a driving instructor and then almost 15 years studying and practising Traditional Chinese Medicine. The latter had a profound effect on me while the former reflected my earlier unconsciousness and inability to find a path in life.

What follows are episodes from my life from things I have written previously over the years. They are taken from previous recollections and often from readings from diaries that I made several years ago. It is not so much a "biography" as parts of my life that I care to share. They are subjective and not designed to be a work of literature. This autobiography. This is written up for my benefit, as my health declines and is scarcely likely to be of much interest to others. Nevertheless, I am throwing them out to the few that might find them of interest. Everything I have alluded to here is discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

I feel an urgency to get out what is essentially a life assessment.

If there is a lot of material so have put it through electronic editing software. If you see any strange discrepancies in style it may be because I have put the text through Chat GPT.

Intuition tells me I feel the urge to get out what is essentially a life review urgently. I write quickly and steadily as memories pass through me. That may mean that the book is not a

great work of literature and the editing may not be perfect. I have compromised by putting it through an AI editing tool while endeavouring to maintain my own style. If you discover the odd discrepancy and the odd sentence or paragraph may seem a bit flowery. That is because I have put the odd bit through Chat GPT that can throw up some interesting writing that is often far from what I intended.

I hope you will enjoy reading this. If you want to skip some parts, like my earlier life, which may seem a bit tedious, then the contents may help you to skip to those parts that are more interesting.

Part One:

Living Unconsciously



Chapter 1 - Early life

1956, the year in which I was born, was momentous.

Quite apart from my fateful appearance in the world, it was the year of the Hungarian revolution, of the Suez Canal invasion, and the year in which Khrushchev revealed to the Soviet Communist Party Congress the secrets of Stalin's crimes.

It was the time of life when my parents were building up a life after the war.

World War II had taken out the best years of my father's life when he was in his prime, fighting in Crete and North Africa, including at Alamein.

My father was an introverted man. His mother had had three sets of twins and he was unfortunate to be the oldest twin. Hence, he was largely unloved by his mother who during the war reportedly left his letters on the table unopened. He must've carried a lot of pain from that. But for us, he showed his love the only way he could - through hard work to provide a future for his children.

My mother carried a sense of unrealized potential throughout her life, along with a longing for something more profound. She later revealed that her heart's desire was not to become a farmer's wife but rather, a doctor.

My mother, like many women of that era, harboured her own aspirations. She had dreams of becoming a doctor, but unfortunately, her parents had different plans for her. She was encouraged to lead a life of comfort and enjoyed activities such as horse riding and competing in showjumping. Her story was typical for girls of that time and social class. She was waiting until she met the man she would eventually marry.

My mother had a show jumping accident in her prime and broke her neck. She recovered but was wracked by pain for the rest of her life.

My father had gone away to war as a volunteer, in the First Echelon. He was able to return home earlier, hence my parents were married in 1944. They commenced farming at *Te Wai*, next to the Westenra family farm, Camla.

Life was simple, There was no electricity and my mother churned milk for butter. The farm was next to the Selwyn River; they were flooded out several times,

My brother Jeremy was the first to arrive in April 1947 followed shortly thereafter by my sister Kathy, in 1948.

I was the third child and came along as an "afterthought".

It must have rankled with my siblings, as 8 to 9 years olds, to have their beloved dog, Paddy taken away from them in consideration of the newborn baby.

The story was that when I came along my father asked his best friend, Peter Keddell, to come out because he wanted to show him something on the farm. He drove Peter out to the far end of the farm and pulled a bottle of gin out of the boot of the car. After several classes and 'Dutch courage' my father finally got around to asking Peter if he would be godfather to his baby Robin.

This was the same man who, when the New Zealand troops were being evacuated from Crete and bombed by the Germans, sat on the deck of the ship and without any concern for his safety, maintained his men's morale by regaling them with stories about how he and his horse Burglar had won the Grand National.

My parents moved from their first farm at *Te Wai* to a second one near Pleasant Point, inland from Timaru. I came along on the 30th of July, 1956. I have few clear memories of my first years on this earth but have picked up stories from my family. These are intermingled with isolated and vague memories, I do vaguely remember going to school in Pleasant Point with a brown leather satchel and a plastic lunchbox of honey sandwiches because that was the only thing that I would eat.

I was a fussy eater, or at least excessively conservative. I loved my weetbix, followed by eggs for breakfast and roast lamb with the small range of vegetables that I would even look at – such as carrots and peas for dinner. I think that was about the extent of my diet.

I remember when our whole family was at Omarama while my father went gliding. On this particular visit, he was oblivious to the fact that his family was flooded out of their tent and had to take refuge in a local hotel. I don't remember this myself but it is a story that my family has often repeated. Apparently, I loved to have my eggs and bacon first because that's what I enjoyed and would follow that up with my Weetbix. I wanted to follow this pattern at the breakfast table in the restaurant, but the Australian waitress would have none of it and said in an imperious voice "*Weetbix is first!*"

I do remember holidays with my family at Kakanui, near Oamaru. We must have watched Peter Snell, and Murray Halberg running because, the story goes, I ran about in my underpants, pretending to be Peter Snell, the great athlete.

Peter Keddell and his family farmed close by and there were many joint family outings. The two families would go ice skating at Cave. I used to push a chair around on skates.

Then there were holidays at Lake Ohau - there Robina Keddell and her three children, William, Phillip and Stephen, stayed in an old tram, which I can remember.

The two men were always absent because they were at home working on the farm. Throughout the time they were farming, except for their six-month overseas trip in 1967, I do not recall my father ever going on holiday.

I must have been a frustrating child for my mother, clinging and needy – I do remember I commonly whined, “*I don’t know what to do*”, as I followed my mother out once you put the washing on the line.

In 1963, when I was six, my parents moved from their farm in South Canterbury to the farm at Summerhill in North Canterbury we called Fermoy, situated between Cust and Oxford. In contrast to life on the South Canterbury farm, I have the most vivid and happy memories of life there.

Our house was a blue cob house, which even then had already stood for a century. Its walls were an impressive three feet thick, which ensured a relatively consistent temperature throughout the seasons, which allowed the house to remain cool during the summer and warm during the winter.

It was a wonderful farm to grow up on and I particularly loved the outbuildings, including the woolshed, where I helped out during the shearing season, and explored the wonderful attic which had many treasures stored in it, including an old stole made of fox fur, my father’s old military uniform and many photographs from my mother’s showjumping days. Unfortunately, all my Mum’s old photos were thrown out in a subsequent move. I never understood why they were ever consigned to an attic in the first place.

My brother Jeremy used to put his building skills to work by building me tree huts and a fort that I used to call Fort Buckland. Born almost 10 years before me, he was often absent, either at boarding school or elsewhere. He always seemed old-fashioned, almost from a different generation. It was different with my sister, Kathy.

We had a happy and close relationship.

Back in South Canterbury, she used to offer me homely advice to her five-year-old brother while he was having his bath, such as “*Sticks and stones may break your bones but words will never hurt you*” or “*You’re not the only pebble on the beach*”. It’s odd what sticks in one’s memory.

Later on, perhaps when I was seven or eight, she introduced me to the Beatles and took me to a double feature, *A Hard Day’s Night and Help!* In Christchurch. Another favourite of Kathy’s was Trini Lopez, while the more conservative Jeremy preferred *Can Can* and Cliff Richard’s *Summer Holiday*. Kathy also introduced me at a tender age, to my first alcohol, when she surreptitiously added it to my lemonade.

When TV came along in 1965 amongst all the programs were classics like *Fireball XL5* and *Robin Hood*, I loved Danny Kaye. Unbeknownst to my parents, I placed an article in the Press for a “Danny Kaye Fan Club”. Several people must have answered, for I wrote away and received copies of pictures signed by the man himself which I was able to send to my members. Writing away to Hollywood to get autographed photographs of my favourite stars was a bit of a pastime. I always received a reply.

When I entered my cowboy phase I became obsessed with a New Zealand country and western singer, John Hore, and collected every record I could of him.

The Cottrells had a son, Michael (or Mickey) who was the same age. We used to play cowboys and Indians together and hang out in the old fort that my brother Jeremy built for me, or in a tree hut. I had a few other playmates like Gerard Thomson who lived in Cust. We lived 5 miles from each other but were able to visit each other. My other mate of the time was Steve Keddell. Being 18 months his junior, I often inherited his throw-off clothes, which I associate for some reason with the colour blue.

Being a funny wee boy and not having any siblings of my age, a lot of my play was solitary and I developed a good imagination. Invariably, it revolved around cowboys and Injuns. In play, I don't think anyone consented to play the role of an "Injun" because the cowboys always won!

These were the days of a stable climate when we had beautiful summers. We swam in the pristine waters of the Ashley River or had picnics at Ashley Gorge. I am fairly sure that these rivers are now unswimmable, on account of dairy farming which is a monoculture in contrast to the mixed or sheep farming of the day.

In winter there were plenty of clear frosty mornings and beautiful days when I remember feeding out to the sheep. I used to go out with my father in his wonderful old truck, filling it with hay and driving out to feed out to the sheep. When I was old enough, my father drove the truck or tractor while I fed out the hay.

I had my first driving lessons with my father, sitting on his knee and steering the vehicle as we drove around the paddock. Later on, I was allowed to drive through the paddock with my father sitting alongside me. I'm not sure that at some stage I didn't drive the vehicle into a ditch, or something.

We had an old-fashioned phone and our telephone number was 3K Cust; we were on a party line and my mother got exasperated because our neighbour Lois Cottrell would often be listening on the other end of the phone to Mum's conversations

I have a recollection of agreeing with my two friends, Mickey, who lived on the farm next door, and Neil, who lived a couple of miles along the road in the direction of Cust, to run away from home on some great adventure. When it was dark I sneaked out of the house and walked down to the Cottrells, sneaking into their house only to find that Mickey was in bed fast asleep. So there was only one thing for it, I would have to set out on my own and so I started walking towards Neil's place (a funny little pink cottage a couple of miles down the road). Something must have alerted my family to the fact that I had set off and it was picked up by car before making it to Neil's place.

That was the end of my adventure.

The Cottrells also owned an aged pony named Star, who tended to be overweight and

prone to founder. Nevertheless, Star became my introduction to horseback riding. Although my father was a skilled equestrian, I don't recall him providing much in terms of formal instruction. Instead, a saddle was placed on Star's back, with a wheat sack as saddle blanket and equipped with bucket stirrups.

Essentially, I was placed on the horse and sent off on my own.

I distinctly remember Star galloping through the trees and unseating me along the way. I remember my parents saying that one hadn't truly learned to ride until one had been thrown off a horse 13 times. Those were the days before health and safety!

I had the pleasure of enjoying delightful rides with my mother and my sister Kathy. Kathy would often borrow a chestnut horse called Ginger from a neighbour down the road. I have cherished photographs of my mother and me on horseback, capturing those precious moments. Additionally, I have an old and slightly faded photograph from a party, featuring Doug Ensor with my mother sitting backward on Star.

Later on, when I was about 12, I was given my first pony, Peter. He moved with us to our new home in Halswell, Christchurch when my father retired to 20 acres on the edge of town. In those days I was able to ride along the verges of the roads and never be bothered by much traffic.

That's so different to today when you take your life in your hands if you decide to ride a horse anywhere along the roads.

The old two-storey homestead in Halswell, built 140 years ago, from pit-sawn timber, is now surrounded by the ugliest new housing development and has been turned into a restaurant. All the land and the farm buildings are now gone, giving way to (not so) 'little boxes' built since the 2011 earthquake of 2011 as the city expands to the south, leaving the devastation wreaked in the centre and east of the city.

After an idyllic childhood, I was sent off to boarding school, the subject of the next chapter.



My mother at her wedding, 1944



My parents with in-laws from the Orbell family in the late- 1940s



Baby Robin



Happy days. The wonderful farm at Summerhill and Star, ca. 1964



Robin on Star and Mum on Ginger



Kathy and Mum with the horses



In the garden with my first pony, Peter, 1969

Chapter 2 - At School



The main building at Waihi Preparatory School

I was sent off to boarding school at the tender age of 9, after a couple of years at the local school in Cust in the tradition of Canterbury farming families.

Waihi was a small preparatory school with less than 100 pupils and had a tradition of its pupils running wild, building tree huts, and more worryingly, underground tunnels; a stop was put to that quite quickly.

I was a sensitive child. I suppose boarding school was supposed to be character-building. However when I was sent off from home I was still wetting my bed; I have memories of being teased about this mercilessly, as well as having to clean my sheets in freezing water on cold South Canterbury frosty mornings.

For all that, life at boarding school was reasonably benign, although my friend Steve, who had a far more vivid memory than me, remembered things differently

In my first year, the dormitories were in the old wooden building and there were no showers. The boys had to share a bath with water that was cold and dirty by the time they got there. I have a recollection of being caught talking after lights out and being taken down to the bathroom to be slipped. In my second year, we moved into the brand-new dormitory block, which along with the classroom block marked the first modernisation in the history of the school. By contrast with the old block, the dormitories had proper showers.

The visceral memories of cold have faded, but it must have been freezing in winter. We all wore shorts all year round, even in the cold winters.

In winter there was an open fire in the large assembly hall, which I remember had a painting of the frostbitten Capt Oates from Scott's 1912 Antarctic expedition saying "*I might be some time*" as he stoically walked out to his death. All the boys gathered around to be as close as they could, to the warmth. On winter evenings, we were given cups of cocoa, served out from large pots. We were given boxing lessons by someone who came in once a week in the common room. I remember hating that.

Looking back, it seems that those 4 years marked a sort of transition from the old imperial tradition, represented by the picture of Captain Oates, to a more modern age, marked by showers instead of shared baths.

I remember the mayor of Temuka coming to school to give us art lessons. My friend Matthew Turnbull and I painted a mural of the Battle of Trafalgar or some other sea battle and I used to draw lots of pictures of the picturesque landscape that featured lots of willow trees.

This corresponded with the introduction of television. The whole school used to congregate in the library and sit cross-legged to watch our favourite TV programmes. We all watched the broadcast of the 1969 Apollo 11 Moon landing. This must have been the first footage of anything broadcast by satellite; one couldn't make anything out, but it was very exciting.

The bane of my life was compulsory team sports; from an early age, I hated team sports like cricket and rugby and I still do. One small advantage of our modern, internet age is I no longer have to watch sports, the obsession of the country, on the telly. It used to be the age of "*rugby, racing and beer*" back then.

I have far more fond memories of playing in tree huts and the wonderful times spent outdoors. Much of my time was spent in the library and solitary pursuits. I spent many happy hours doing different research projects such as learning the names of all the world's capital cities or making my own maps of all the states of the USA. To this day, I have a good concept of American geography and can still tell you the capital cities of many countries.

I also studied everything there was to know about the life and death of Capt. R.F. Scott and his 1912 expedition to the South Pole, making scrapbooks of newspaper cuttings. I can still remember, to this day, some of the great events of 1968, such as the assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, as well as the Wahine disaster.

I also spent a lot of time living out my fantasy life. As an 11-year-old I wrote stories about characters such as the heroic cowboy, Jim Logan. These stories were sometimes up to 100 pages long, mostly because I wrote in very large handwriting. My sister, Kathy, who had completed a shorthand typing course at Pitman's Secretarial College and took on a

job at Kodak as a secretary- typist must have had time on her hands for she kindly types my stories for me at work.

At the same time as this, I set up the DHS (*the Dog and Horse Society*), which as I remember only ever had three other members— my mother, my Aunt Barbara and Johnny Rhodes, a mentally-challenged friend and outsider at boarding school. I remember poor Johnny scoring his first rugby try. The only problem was, he ran in the wrong direction and so had the whole field to himself, everyone laughing at him. Poor Johnny. He hated so much the dreadful fish that we were served up while I was made to stay at the table until I finished my meal of luncheon sausage and salad. I also remember the piles of sugar that went on my porridge (a habit I still haven't completely thrown off!), and eating my sausages with butter, because I didn't like tomato sauce.

They were by - and- large, carefree happy times.

1967 was the year my parents went on a six-month overseas trip and I was farmed out to various uncles and aunts during the school holidays.

The holidays spent at Camla with Aunt Barbara and Uncle Gerald were wonderful. Aunt Barbara, in addition to being a founding member of the Dog and Horse Society, was invariably kind and allowed me to eat as many Weetbix as I wanted. Uncle Gerald and Aunt Barbara resided in a grand house that was slightly reminiscent of C.S. Lewis's *The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe*, at least in my eyes. The house had a magnificent staircase and a spacious area underneath, where I discovered a treasure trove of playthings, including an old gramophone. I happily spent countless hours exploring and playing beneath those stairs.

My experience with Aunt Ann and Uncle Dick wasn't as enjoyable, because they insisted on serving me macaroni cheese, a dish I didn't particularly like. Furthermore, they attempted to discourage my habit of adding three teaspoons of sugar to my tea, a practice I had picked up during my time at boarding school. However, I have very fond memories of Aunt Ann and Uncle Dick, especially as I got to know them better in later years.

My childhood was largely a list of things that we did with the Keddell family. Steve was a great childhood friend, both at home and at school. Peter, his father was my godfather and his mother Robina was a great pal of my mother's. The two families often did things together: skating at Cave; outings from school to the Winchester Show and to Waihi Gorge, where we played "*murder*" and caught and cooked trout. I often used to visit and sometimes stay during the holidays - first at Chapel Farm near Cust and later at their home in Repton Street in Christchurch. I associate the story of Joseph from the Bible with my godfather Peter who used to read it to us and shared the same bedroom as my friend Steve who was about 18 months older than me. I'm sure I was the butt of pranks played by the older Keddell boys and I remember my brother, Jeremy, would always hide his Dinky toys if he knew the Keddell boys were coming.



My mother and Aunt Barbara during the 1960s

At the age of 13, I was sent to a very traditional school in Christchurch, Christ's College, that has educated many sons of the Canterbury ruling class and farmers to become influential, successful members of New Zealand Society.

I didn't do well in the entrance examination, for I was relegated to 3C, a midstream class. Even though, as I realise in retrospect, I was offered a good education and had several fine teachers, I did not thrive, however, and my more creative and imaginative side was largely suppressed. Consequently, I only studied with due diligence those things that caught my imagination. I often found myself punished, mostly by caning, for minor infractions that mostly had to do with mundane things such as not doing my homework.

I am sure that the real reason was that I was "different". In part, I was punished for my association with an inspiring teacher, Frank Andrews, who fostered my creative side as well as my passion for astronomy. He was hated by my narrow-minded and vindictive housemaster, "Potguts" Barton, whose greatest love seemed to be instilling conformity to

mainstream values. Consequently, for some time I was barred from attending evening sessions of the Canterbury Astronomical Society which were held in the Christ's College Hall.

Obviously, it was more important that I should do my three hours of homework!

There were many petty rules, such as being forbidden from walking on the main quadrangle. I have a fairly painful memory of being sent during my lunch hour once out of the college gates and around the corner to Mr Barton's house, where I had to ask his wife for the cane, which I had to carry back to the House so that I could be ritually caned with all the prefects present and to come down the stairs afterwards where everyone was waiting.

It was brutal and certainly no way to treat a sensitive, growing boy. Looking back, I can see no justification for this barbarity, a hangover from the Victorian era.

I found my outlet in astronomy and stargazing, something that started at Waihi, where it was encouraged.

I had developed a passion for astronomy when I was still at Waihi and read and studied as much as I could, including wonderful books by the likes of the famous Patrick Moore. I shared this interest with another boy, Andrew Collier, who was a little younger, a little more brilliant than I, - he got 99% in school certificate mathematics, and was destined to become a well-known professional astronomer. Andrew was, however, a funny little boy who used to collect insects and beetles which he kept in matchboxes. We used to sneak out during the winter nights to stargaze and familiarise ourselves with the constellations.

At the age of 14, when I was permitted to attend meetings, I gave a talk to all the adults of the Astronomical Society on "*Stellar Evolution and the Hertzsprung- Russell diagram*". I also started a project, with my friend, Greg Welch, to produce a photographic star atlas. It never came to anything but I spent many happy hours copying out information from a star catalogue of the different constellations, as well as making some wonderful photographs of the night sky. Later on, while still at school, I was given the opportunity to give public talks on astronomy at the planetarium at the Canterbury Museum.

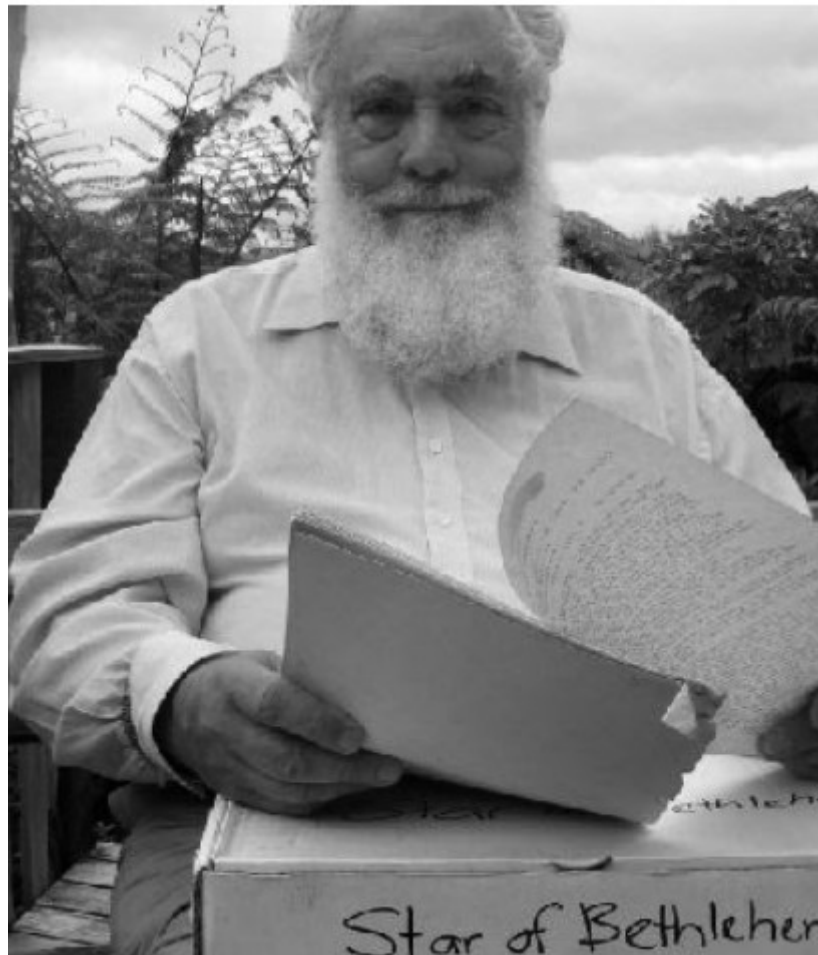
Back then, the skies were dark and very clear and I'm sure that we were able to see down to the magical sixth magnitude that is supposed to be the limit of what can be seen by the naked eye. I remember the brilliance of the Milky Way in the southern skies and seeing meteor showers and satellites crossing the sky.

It was very beautiful.

Nowadays, at least in the city, it has become impossible to see anything more than the brightest of stars. Not only have the skies become more polluted and affected by light but the skies have become occluded, perhaps by geoengineering operations. Nowadays, we need to designate special areas such as Lake Tekapo in the South Island as special "*dark sky areas*". Up to 20 or so years ago, even the suburbs had clear skies. The clear skies

that I remember from my childhood in Canterbury have long since gone and along with it much of the magic I felt from looking up into the heavens 50 years ago.

Unfortunately, my ambition to become an astronomer was marred by my dislike of mathematics (taught by the hated "Potguts" Barton), mediocre marks in school certificate physics and hopeless results in chemistry. I realised, in my university entrance year, that I was not cut out to be an astronomer, so I decided, mid-year, against all advice, to give up chemistry and take up history. I was told that it was impossible, but by the end of the year, I had not only passed my history examination but came second in my class.



Frank Andrews was one of the most inspiring influences during my time at secondary school

I was always an outsider while at secondary school but soon found another reason to stand outside the mainstream. I had a penchant for writing away to foreign embassies for information about their countries. By far the most generous was the Soviet Legation, which sent me not only leaflets about the huge social achievements of the USSR but also several works by Lenin.

Naturally, I flaunted these books at school and the taunts came back "*You're a communist!*". Well, I thought, perhaps I am! And these comments were enough to stimulate me to find out as much as I could about Marxism - Leninism and "*scientific atheism*" and to start learning the Russian language, which I immediately excelled at. In later years, I became a fluent speaker. I seemed to have a natural flair for the language.

None of this was a recipe for courting popularity at a very conservative school in a conservative country but every action produced an equal reaction in me.

In short, it always rankled being called a '*blackball*', (as Christ's College pupils were called by the world outside. I started to hate the milieu that I came out of and identified with the 'people' - essentially with the downtrodden and outsiders like myself. Some of that has remained with me to this day; I have no sympathy for the ruling elite.

One of the great things about my education is that I received my first environmental education. For instance, I remember quite early on, in social studies classes learning about population explosion. We were taught how the year 2000 would be the year in which "*the stork would pass the crow*". In other words, this was when the population, which was projected to reach 6 billion, would exceed the ability to feed them. While at school, I read the seminal book by Paul Ehrlich, *the Population Bomb*, which was in the school library.

I also remember we had a wonderful liberal studies teacher, an American, Mr Carville Carpenter. When we did projects on the different religions - I chose, instead of studying religion, to do a project on '*atheism*'. I remember distinctly reading then that Buddhism was an 'atheistic religion'. That was all I knew about Buddhism until years later.

I also distinctly recall Mr. Carpenter quoting Jacques Cousteau about the deteriorating state of the oceans back then, in 1973. I recall a class when one smartass put up his hand and asked what Mr Carpenter thought about (John) Lennon. Poor Mr Carpenter didn't understand the question and thought he was being asked what he thought of Lenin. Naturally, this produced great mirth.

Unfortunately, Mr. Carpenter, who was one of my inspirational teachers, had to leave the school very suddenly, under mysterious circumstances, which I suspect were connected with sexual misconduct.

My friend Frank Andrews ('Captain Haddock'),, who was a biology teacher, I remember, produced a resource on a cyclostyled sheet providing anecdotes and facts about all the environmental problems of the time. One thing that vividly remains in my memory is a report concerning the impact of DDT on bald eagle eggs in the United States. It was discovered that the shells of these eggs were gradually becoming thinner and prone to breaking.

Now the bald-headed eagle is under threat again.

There were, I admit, looking back, many positive aspects to an education at Christ's College. But this should be available to all, not only to those that have the money to pay for it.

Right from the age of about 12 or 13, I had strange things happen, such as the onset of a skin condition, which has never left me. After exposure to water, such as swimming or taking a shower I would be driven to distraction by severe itching which would only pass after about half an hour and suffered from many many strange and inexplicable symptoms

which caused the doctors and medical specialists to scratch their heads.

I also experienced symptoms of what might be called “depression”, an inexplicable sense of sadness or melancholy. My parents, who must have been at a total loss as to how to deal with it and took me to see a Dr Ding, who tried his best to treat me with group therapy. Luckily, these were in the days before antidepressants like Prozac became popular. Naturally, the group therapy didn't work, just like the many other treatments for my various ailments.

I now think that this was not depression in the commonly-accepted medical sense and therefore would not respond to any conventional treatment.

I believe this was, rather, a manifestation of what is called in homoeopathy, a *miasm* which is "*a general weakness or predisposition to chronic disease that is transmitted down the generational chain*". Not only was I exposed to pesticides but I believe I also suffered from the results of my mother's exposure. My mother, who was already smaller and less robust than her sisters was, I am sure, living on a farm, exposed to chemicals, as were her children. I believe this was the origin of things of other weaknesses in my health that went to plague me later in my life.

Mum went on, in later life to develop and die from breast cancer, while my elder brother has gone on to suffer from several strange autoimmune diseases.

In particular, I'm sure that I have suffered from the consequences of being exposed to toxic pesticides, such as paraquat. My godfather, much later, Peter, recalled how my father and he used to mix up the DDT by hand.

Pesticides, as I found out later, tend to have long-term effects for those who are downwind and absorb into their lungs (and bodies) the smaller molecules which go on to injure the endocrine and other body systems in later years.

Chapter 3 - Life in the 1970s



A "young Russian" in a park in Moscow,

I was out of school as soon as I could. I left school at the end of the sixth form, Without waiting for the seventh form and bursary. University education in those days was free and I got what was called a fees bursary.

Instead, at the age of 17, I enrolled in university studies at the University of Canterbury. I took my favourite subjects, Russian and history, as well as in another subject, Education; I neither completed nor sat the exam.

I excelled at my Russian studies and took to the language like a duck to the water and was very good at grammar and translation, far beyond the abilities of my fellow students who would have been hard-placed to string a Russian sentence together. I remember when a Soviet teacher, Nadezhda Pomorantseva, based at Otago University, visited and said something basic in Russian such as "*Hello, how are you?*" no one understood her. She could have been talking "*double Dutch*" to my fellow students, but I found I could understand her.

This was the final year the University arts faculty was in the historic city site before moving out to its new, concrete campus out at Ilam. I loved the old university with its stone buildings where generations, including Sir Ernest Rutherford, had studied. It was a breath of fresh air after being down the road at Christ's College which I had nothing to do with.

I used to frequently visit Russian ships. Perhaps my first visit was to a ship called the *Polina Osipenko*. I befriended a Russian seaman from Riga, Arkady Bogdanov. To this day

I still have the recordings that he made for me with a simple microphone of his favourite artist, Polish singer, Anna German. I also took him back home to our large house in Halswell where he met my mother, which must have been an amazing experience for a Soviet Citizen. When I took him to the centre of the city the next day and who should we meet on the street but my mother!

At about this time, I joined the New Zealand-USSR Society which held monthly meetings in which films were shown or there were occasional guests from the Soviet Union.

My Russian lecturers at university were Alex Lojkin, a Frenchman with Russian roots, who delighted at showing us students up as complete ignoramuses, John Goodliffe, who taught the Russian language with a strong north English accent, and Henry Wrassky, a Soviet refugee, who had come to New Zealand from Melbourne. Henry and I maintained a friendship for many years after I left university. Many times we solved the problems of the world over a glass of vodka or his beloved cognac.

I also loved my history studies, especially the first two years which covered European history right from mediaeval times through the Reformation and Renaissance, the Enlightenment, French Revolution, the 19th century and finally the events which so captivated me in the 20th century. I can't have been a very good historian, at least from the conventional point of view, because my marks, although enough to carry me through a major, were anything but exceptional. Generally speaking, with the notable exception of Russian, where I got straight A's, I was a C+ student, partially because I insisted on marring my progress by parting with the conventional view of history and writing essays interpreting my subjects from a Marxist point of view. This did not go down very well with the Establishment.

The arts faculty moved to Ilam in the second year of my studies. The new environment did not suit me in the least and I felt lonely and isolated in the concrete jungle. I remember walking between the buildings in cold windy weather, not knowing a single soul. I also remember the sensation of feeling something akin to having a skullcap on. It was the closest that I felt to real depression.

I found my social contacts outside the university and took solace by removing myself where I could from the mainstream and decided, even though I was 'bourgeois', from an 'aristocratic family', to join the communist Socialist Unity Party.

Bizarrely, It gave me some sense of belonging within a society from which I felt estranged. There were still people who had experienced struggles from the 1930s, the war and whose worldview was created largely by the 1951 lockout dispute. Even here I was not really a conformist. I knew enough about history to know that the official Soviet history was bunk and consigned important personages, to being non-persons.

However, I have to point out that in some way I was acting unconsciously and had no concept either of what was best for me or how to 'get on'. I just followed what interested or appealed to me and put the rest aside. This is a constant refrain in the earlier part of my life.

In my second year at university, I moved out of home and for the first time went flatting, sharing a flat with one other person. I started making new friends, largely through my extracurricular activities. One was a burly, very friendly fitter-welder by the name of Tony Bashford, who I met through the Soviet Friendship Society.

I also met my first girlfriend, Lesley Hurrell, in the same way. She was coming along to the New Zealand-USSR Society out of cultural interests. We started to go out together on Saturday nights and I remember going to some of the wonderful films that came out in the 1970s and then going on after the film, to the only cafe, the Flamenco, that was still open after the movies finished for hot chocolate.

Lesley visited me at my flat in Carlton Mill Road; I then took her back home to Shirley on the back of my Honda 50 scooter on icy, freezing-cold Christchurch nights. This was a time when we used to frequently have pea soup fogs that were so thick you couldn't see more than a few feet in front of you. Those were the days when coal was burned in a city prone to smog and we still had a gas works.

Socialist Unity Party meetings, which were held weekly, were a pretty boring affair. Quite how the government and the security service saw these people as a threat to national security is beyond me. They weren't even the most extreme trade unionists. The head of the party in Christchurch was Frank McNulty, who was the head of the meat workers union and whose hour of glory was the crushed 1951 waterfront dispute.

However, it's true, I'm sure, that the Soviet government did give money to the Party, but that was simply due to inertia and Soviet policy; a sclerotic and aged Soviet party carrying on an old-standing policy of supporting an organisation that without its assistance would have folded up in five minutes.

The person I had the most to do with was Mike Creel who had been a conscientious objector during World War II, not because he was a pacifist but because at the time he supported the Molotov – Ribbentrop pact. He was also the president of the New Zealand-USSR Society in Christchurch and a rather dour man who was also an unreconstructed Stalinist.

The most interesting people that I met were Robyn Black and Ron O'Brien. They were in their late 20s when I was in my late teens and they acted as perfect role models at the time for me. They had only comparatively recently returned from a year in Moscow. They were not only enthusiastic Communists but they were also hippies, who practised yoga, smoked pot and sunbathed nude outside their wonderful ramshackle downstairs flat off Hackthorne Road in Cashmere.

I think, like me, that they were essentially nonconformists and certainly didn't fit into the very conservative values of the Party – and were, I'm sure, objects of some suspicion on the part of the crusty old organisation.

For the young rebel from a traditional family, who was still basically wet between the ears, meeting Robyn and Ron was certainly a revelation and I spent many hours at their place,

reading their books, eating rye bread for the first time in my life, learning how to develop film and print photos in their wonderful laboratory. Behind the wall was not only the photo lab but also a space where they grew marijuana under artificial lighting.

It provided a place where I could witness, I would say, rather than participate, in the counterculture of the mid-70s. I remember some of the interesting people that visited, the parties, the marijuana joints that were passed around, and the music which was a cross-section of some of the best protest and rock music of the day. I tried my best to be part of the scene but never quite succeeded.

Ron and Robyn cut quite a figure for me. Ron, the seamen, with his long moustache and leather jacket - Robyn the feminist, in her dungarees, who would try on any job, whether it was out as a truck driver or a masseuse at a sauna bath. Ron and Robyn played an important role in my life and introduced me to a whole new world. They were independent thinkers in a conservative and insular society. They were also radical Communists.

I wondered what had happened to them in subsequent years and what direction life took them. I lost all contact with Robyn but did encounter Ron once briefly at Auckland airport when I was leaving for overseas. It was an awkward interaction and there was no time for a catch-up.

I have memories that have become dulled with time, of peace marches and mass demonstrations on Cathedral Square against policies of the Muldoon government, of the Resistance Bookshop, of meetings of CAFCA (Campaign Against Foreign Control in Aotearoa), and of a harmless and non-consequential night-time raid of Wigram air base, which went completely unnoticed by the authorities.

I'm sure that if I was doing this today, my activities would not have gone unnoticed by the security forces, if not by the NSA. I would probably be on a no-fly list and almost certainly have fallen on the foul side of the law for something that was fundamentally harmless, of almost zero threat to the security of the nation, and was only an act of rebellion and dissent.

As a young and active member of the New Zealand-USSR Society, I came to meet many interesting people, members of the Soviet elite that visited New Zealand periodically. They would almost always come in delegations that sometimes included luminaries such as the composers Nikita Bogoslovsky and Raymond Pauls, but sometimes as in the case of Eduard Nukhovich, and Vladimir Trukhanovsky, came on their own, hosted by the local friendship society.

I remember during the New Zealand Games that were being held at the time being invited to dinner in a restaurant to honour the Soviet athletes. Apart from meeting such luminaries as a Soviet heavyweight wrestling champion and the famous gymnast Olga Korbut, I had the chance of going to a reception, held in a swanky restaurant. Prime Minister Rob Muldoon and a group of his cronies were seated at another table. Muldoon turned his chair towards our group and glowered at the table of Soviets and their New Zealand guests for what seemed a long time.

That was the closest I've come to any New Zealand Prime Minister.

I spent several months between university and when I left. During this period I worked on the railways at Waltham Yard, which was really an insight into the old working class before neoliberalism arrived on the scene in the 1980s. In a way, it was a case of the Soviet maximum, "*They pretend to pay us and we pretend to work*". Only the second part was true because in those days one could bring up a family on one income and didn't need to hold down several jobs. Pilfering was common. Everybody was already waiting to leave the moment 4.35 came along. If there was any extra time worked it was paid at time-and-a-half. Any work on Sundays was paid at double time. Compared to nowadays this was a workers' paradise. It all came to a halt with restructuring and the decimation of the trade union movement in the 1980s Rogernomics reforms.

I continued to visit Soviet ships in Lyttelton and to improve my spoken Russian. I have some clear memories of that time – many cups of tea and discussions with a good-natured first mate (who was always the political commissar on the M/S *Anyui*). I had the opportunity once to sit in on one of the obligatory political meetings where the commissar delivered a boring and not very heartfelt lecture on world affairs which no one believed in. During this, the crew showed their great interest by playing battleships.

It was this cynicism and disdain that helped to sink the Soviet Union just as much as anything else, just a little more than a decade later.

I facilitated some I hi-jinks with a couple of seamen, one of them, the ship's doctor from a Leningrad vessel. They had made contact with a couple of the ladies of the port and I drove them over to somewhere in Christchurch, where they had a party with copious quantities of vodka. The lads disappeared into the bedroom for some time with their lady companions. It was already quite late. They remembered that they had better put an appearance on the ship and I drove them back, so drunk that I do not know to this day how we got there. I drove the ladies home. I lost my virginity that night, an experience that, no doubt due to our mutual intoxication, was not earth-shattering.

In September 1977 I left for Moscow on my first overseas trip for 10 months studying at the Moscow Institute of Social Sciences.

I think the main thing I learnt most from that trip was the Soviet art of rendering unto Caesar what was due to Caesar and of not speaking one's real mind.

I developed a good friendship with the son of one of the lecturers, Boris Rubtsov, who was the same age as me and studying to become an economist. We had a good relationship, and he took me to visit some of the more interesting historical sites in Moscow such as the Sheremetyevo Palace. Boris was quiet-spoken and diffident (perhaps because of the political realities) and our relationship was remarkable less for what we said but more for what we didn't say. Boris, like everyone, after the collapse of the USSR, reinvented himself and went on to become a professor of international finance at the University of Finance. I regularly visited Sophia Sergeevna, the elderly mother of my Russian lecturer back at

Canterbury, Henry Wrassky. She lived in two rooms at the back of someone else's apartment in a lovely old wooden building that has now long since given way to ugly apartment blocks. I remember her telling me that some of the old residents of the old wooden buildings hanged themselves rather than move into the massively-ugly and impersonal highrises.

I was able to explore the city and, as a foreigner, enjoyed access to tickets to the theatre and ballet - something that was not so easily accessible to the general population, although the tickets were, by any standard, cheap. I also frequented the *Beriozka* foreign currency-only shops where one could buy goods not available to the general population. I remember, once, being stopped at the entrance of the shop by a security guard because I must have looked like a young Russian. There were special shops, closed to the public where the elite could buy things that were unavailable to the general population. Walk into any Soviet grocery store of the time and the shelves were practically empty. If there was anything worth buying it had to be queued for. That's why people always carried an *avoska*, a "just in case" string shopping bag. The best quality fresh food was available at the private markets, where collective farmers came to sell produce grown on their permitted private plots. These private plots practically fed the nation.

At the end of my time in Moscow, I took the train to Denmark and then travelled by ferry to England, where I met my family. I remember my mother (who had a romantic attachment to the "green and pleasant land" of England, on the drive through the flat country of Essex exclaiming, "*This is not the real England!*"). For her, her beloved England was always the verdant home counties.

After spending time at the magnificent centuries-old ancestral home at Birling Place, Mum, Kathy, Jeremy and I went for a short trip to Paris. It was wonderful to do things as a family; eat baguettes with French cheese and wine; wander the streets and take in the atmosphere of Paris, which, being August, was mostly on holiday. One place we saw was the Place de Pigalle, famous for its sex shops. My mother loved it. We were amused by Mum, who, looking at a sex toy, perhaps not really knowing what it was for, exclaimed, "*How lovely!*".

I took the train back to Moscow; at the border crossing from Poland to Russia; we all had to disembark while customs officials went through our luggage with a fine toothcomb. and took for themselves my biro with a sexy lady that I had bought in Paris but for some reason allowed me to keep the record, which I had bought in Paris, a French recording of Vladimir Vysotsky, the Soviet bard who had hero status.

After coming back to New Zealand I had a few months working at Sunnyside, the local psychiatric hospital as a cleaner.

That summer, while visiting Marina Page, Henry Wrassky introduced me to Natasha from Leningrad, who was visiting her cousin.

Chapter 4 - Natasha



On returning home, I spent quite a lot of time with my friend and lecturer Henry Wrassky. One day he said he would like to introduce me to someone interesting. We met at the home of Marina Page, a refugee from Lithuania, who lived in Sumner, a short walk from my parents' house. Marina had her cousin Natasha, from Leningrad staying with her for the summer. This was almost unheard of at the time as Soviet citizens could not travel freely. It was always a bit of a mystery to me as to how Natasha got the permissions to travel abroad.

I remember, while we talked, Natasha lying with her back to the window pane, reading a book and showing very little interest in our conversation. Possibly, she was absorbed in reading something that was not permitted in her own country, but perhaps she was just bored out of her mind living with her cousin?

Wrassky said something about us getting together and that's what transpired. Natasha (who was, at 34, 12 years older than me) and I started seeing quite a bit of each other. That was the start of a romance.

Natasha hatched a plan whereby I would meet her in Hanmer Springs, where she was staying, rather reluctantly, with her cousin. The arrangement was rather clandestine and therefore all the more attractive to me. We started a trip together to the West Coast and stayed in Greymouth for a night and then travelled down, through Hokitika to Franz Josef Glacier before returning to Christchurch. Not surprisingly, Marina was livid at Natasha betraying her trust and seducing a young man from an old Canterbury family. Whatever her motives were - calculating or innocent, or perhaps a mixture of the two,

Natasha had me hooked. I felt I was in love

When Natasha flew out to return to Leningrad I bought a ticket to Australia to squeeze in some more time with her. We stayed with old friends of Wrassky in Melbourne who Natasha managed to deeply offend, but we had a fine old time together in Sydney with no one looking over our shoulders. I remember walking a lot, seeing the Sydney Opera House, and drinking beer. We entered one pub where, in those days, there were only men drinking. I remember a wall of Australian faces glaring at Natasha for daring to enter a “men-only” drinking hole.

When I returned to New Zealand I had my first encounter with the rather fascistic Customs at Christchurch airport. I was made to wait until the very last, until after everyone had gone through a Customs search and there was no one else remaining. They then did an exhaustive search of my luggage and presumably thought I was bringing in drugs because I had so little luggage. This was at a time when practically the only reason New Zealanders travelled to Australia was to go shopping.

After that, I settled into my last year at University and devoted considerable energy to getting Natasha out of the Soviet Union. It was a lunatic and ill-advised plan, but very adventurous. The normal person would have given up, but it was a huge adventure for me when I felt constrained by life in insular New Zealand. Every obstacle made me more determined.

Wrassky, who was my Russian lecturer, by now regretted having ever brought us together and tried his best to dissuade me from going further with my odyssey, I recall his remarks along the line that women not being as fertile for as long as men, evidently a reference to the age gap.

My parents probably knew better than to try and persuade me out of my delusions and were remarkably long-suffering, even supportive. There were many difficult, and expensive trunk calls to Leningrad at a time before automatic dialling. Everything had to go through the operator. It was a real feat getting through to the operator in Moscow and then persuading them to connect me with Leningrad. None of this would have been possible had I not been able to practically take over from the New Zealand operator and explain myself in Russian. I remember, one time, trying to get through, asking “*Is this Moscow?*”, “*No! This is South Africa*”.

All of this added to the sense of adventure.

Next came the preparations for travelling to Russia and fulfilling the bureaucratic requirements of the Soviet government. Natasha’s letters were very matter-of-fact and contained no protestation of love. They explained how I needed to have numerous documents, all witnessed by a notary public and by the Soviet Embassy, confirming my identity, that I had no criminal record and so forth. There was a whole list of requirements. I had a contact in the Soviet Embassy, Nikolai Parshenko, who was quite sympathetic and helped me get through all the red tape as best as he could.

Sometime in the winter, during the holidays, I took a trip to Leningrad. I met the family, got the blessing of Natasha's mother, Nina Petrovna and spent some time with Natasha. I had had to enter the USSR on a tourist visa, which meant having to stay in a hotel at monopoly Intourist rates. It also meant that we got to be together during the daytime as I was not permitted to stay with them and Natasha was not allowed to sleep in the hotel.

I remember one amusing episode. I returned to the hotel in Leningrad in the evening and the *babushka* who guarded the floor and gave out the keys refused and insisted on asking "*Where is your delegation?*" The officious old woman refused to believe that I was an individual staying on my own. Every time I protested that I was an individual traveller she kept repeating her question, "*Where is your delegation?*". I had to go downstairs to the service department and explain myself before I could get into my hotel room. One other time, I recall, we had a sense of victory when we managed to find a packet of Dutch laundry powder in GUM on Red Square.

Such was Soviet reality!

I don't think that anyone younger than me, who hadn't spent any time in the USSR, would have any concept of any of this.

I flew out of Copenhagen which meant taking the train from Leningrad through Warsaw, where I spent one night, and then on to Copenhagen. After coming from a country with sparse shelves I was amazed to see shop shelves full of cabbages in the shops of Warsaw. After visiting friends in Copenhagen, the trip home started with the Lufthansa flight being 10 hours late. I was put up for the night in an expensive hotel in Singapore by the airline. The next flight was also late, as was the connecting flight from Sydney to Christchurch so I ended up arriving approximately 24 hours late.

Fast forward to November, after my university exams, I flew again, to Europe, this time to London, where my sister Kathy and my cousin Rosie, took the train to Moscow with me. It was a pleasant trip that must have been interesting for my family. We had a guard bringing us free cups of tea. We had a brief stop in Warsaw. I was sure that we had plenty of time so the three of us went for a walk, minus our passports. After a leisurely stroll through the streets of Warsaw, when we strolled back we were met by a very stern guard who told us we had held up the train and asked us where we had been.

Oops! Can you imagine being stranded in a communist country without luggage or passports?!

Upon our arrival in Moscow, we were greeted warmly by Natasha, who accompanied us on our journey to Leningrad aboard the renowned "*Red Arrow*" train. In Leningrad, Kathy and Rosie met the family and my brother, Jeremy, flew over for the wedding. I remember us going to pick up Jeremy from the railway station after he arrived from Helsinki and chilly walks through the wintry streets of Leningrad,

Eventually, the wedding day arrived, and the ceremony took place in the stately Palace of Weddings, characterised by its formal and distinctly Soviet ambience.

My family were met with a generosity that could hardly be imagined and they were showered with gifts. This became a problem on the Finnish border where they had to explain how they came to have all these things but had no receipts. The Soviets were as concerned with what was leaving the country as much as what was brought in. However, they managed to talk their way through.

I spent some more time in Leningrad and then we moved on to Moscow. Travelling backwards and forwards was one way to save money and to travel by train as much as one could as the train journeys were much less expensive than the exorbitant hotel accommodation. It was also rather pleasant.

That winter was one of the coldest they had had in Russia for several years. I was told how water pipes had cracked in the cold. However, that didn't stop me from doing long walks with Natasha in Moscow, in conditions of minus 24°C. On these walks with Natasha, I discovered some of the most beautiful parts of Moscow, such as Kropotkin Street, and around Novodevichy Monastery, which was closed in those days. I only saw the famous graveyard and the monastery in 2007.

One of the aspects of visiting Natasha was the long shopping lists. I was asked to bring items like a sheepskin coat, made in Christchurch, or some item of stereo equipment bought in Singapore. I had to relinquish all this so it could be resold at a huge profit on the black market and help to finance the whole endeavour.

Looking back, I have to wonder how these travels were financed. It must have all been a strain on my father. I certainly remember cashing in on some things like life insurance and the like that he had taken out for me.

If ever I look back with regret at anything I have done in my life it would have to be putting my parents through all of this.

I don't really know what my parents thought about the strange situation, but they were amazingly supportive and never tried to dissuade me. They greeted the new arrivals with great warmth and affection when Natasha and her family finally arrived in the country in August of the next year.

I remember their total support. They never tried laying down the law, which was perhaps their only weakness concerning me.

Perhaps they sensed my obstinacy and that it was pointless.

I can't have given much thought to how I was going to support this new family.

I had started a job at the Department of Trade and Industry as Assistant Advisory Officer, really a fairly low-level clerical job, deciding whether import licences would be granted, or not. This was in the days when the policy was still one of import substitution and of fostering local industry, one that would go down the gurgler just a few short years later in the Rogernomics neoliberal reforms.

Natasha arrived with her full contingent, consisting of her mother, Vera Petrovna, her aunt, Nina Petrovna and her nine-year-old daughter, Zhenya. We had found a lovely cottage in the middle of Sumner that was ironically situated just over the fence from Natasha's cousin, Marina. I think Natasha's family thought, at least initially, that they had arrived in Paradise. For them, it was like living in a *dacha*, as if they were on a summer holiday. I remember coming home from work once, to find, to my shock, they were lighting up the fire every day, all day and going through the firewood as if there were no tomorrow.

Zhenya started at the local school and was taken under the wing of my mother, 'Granny Moll'.

Natasha had arrived with a whole lot of books on computer programming, presumably in the hope of getting work here. I took her at her word that she was experienced in this area but it didn't take that long to realise that this is not her area of expertise and there were no prospects of her work in this area. In fact, today, it transpires that she never uses a computer.

So, for the time we were together, we were all supported by my very meagre salary, something that is unimaginable today.

Vera Petrovna had very bad angina and after about a month took a bad turn. She was seen by the doctor; the ECGs came back with an all-clear, but the next day she had a massive heart attack and died. This badly dented my faith in medical diagnoses of this sort.

I didn't have any skills to deal with any of this and whatever her hard exterior, and whatever skills and cunning Natasha had with wheeling-and-dealing in the Soviet system, it seems to me that she had little preparation for life here. The death of her mother so soon after arriving, was a huge shock for her and she had a younger husband with no life experiences who had no clue.

It didn't take long to learn about the chasm that divided us culturally.

Natasha, despite being very standoffish, which came across as arrogance, was not as emotionally invulnerable as I people tended to think and her persona was deceptive; She was, in fact, quite emotionally vulnerable. Natasha revealed to me that, years earlier, she had shut herself off in a cupboard. She had developed psoriasis at the time, a debilitating skin condition; during our time together, did cleansing fasts prescribed to her in Russia.

She often didn't speak to people that she wasn't close to and came across as haughty and rude. She was, I think, shy amongst people she didn't relate to. She really did, however, love and respect my parents greatly and was comfortable in their presence. That didn't mean she wasn't capable of purloining one of my Dad's bottles of gin from under his bed, on the sly.

It appears that Natasha harboured a not-so-secret desire to be accepted into what she perceived as one of Canterbury's "aristocratic" families, a desire shared by her cousin

Marina. However, the nature of our relationship was primarily fueled by my idealised fantasies. Others judged Natasha as just using me and my family as a means for her to escape the USSR and seek a better life.

Marina, in particular, took great offence at Natasha's actions during her stay with her and was furious when she believed Natasha had intentionally pursued a relationship with me, seeing it as an attempt to "target" a member of the esteemed Westenra family.

Nearly 40 years later, I still see this as an oversimplification. Although there is some truth, the whole thing was not concocted. The truth is a lot more complicated. There was, for sure, an element of "using " people for her own ends. That was the way to get ahead and part of the Soviet conditioning.

There was also a warmth of heart and a huge generosity towards those in her circle that was, and is, inconceivable to most Anglo-Saxons.

When I met Natasha 30 years later she paid for everything. She paid for a meal at a top-notch Moscow Cafe. She also flew me down from Germany to the French Riviera and paid for my flight from there to London. I can't imagine such generosity from an Anglo-Saxon. Emotionally, I felt a greater link to that mode of living and when we met years later there perhaps was a feeling of familiarity and even love that I have never felt in my own extended family.

The situation began to quickly unravel when Natasha's ex-husband, and Zhenya's father, Misha, paid her a visit from the United States. It is hard to imagine Marina, who harboured strong anti-Semitic views, ever having accepted Misha, who was Jewish. Marina saw Natasha as being a product of the Soviet system and being too involved with the "Jews".

Soon after her mother's death, Natasha returned to Leningrad, ostensibly to handle business matters there. I think it was really to arrange a move to Europe. This was confirmed to me by learning, indirectly, that she had been in contact with her second husband, Tolya, something she never told me. It transpired that Tolya had managed to marry a Finnish woman, divorce his wife in Leningrad, and move to Belgium.

I recall Natasha saying once that New Zealand was "*a paradise for children and young people*". That was not a bad characterisation of the paternalistic New Zealand of the day.

After Natasha returned, our relationship rapidly deteriorated - or, at least in part, made to. There were some unfortunate scenes between us during which, for a short time, I took refuge in the vodka bottle and eventually, I was asked to leave, and after a short and miserable time living in a bedsit in Central Christchurch, went back to live with my parents.

My wife was persuaded by her lawyer to take out a non-molestation order and quickly moved to get a separation agreement, as well as to secure a New Zealand passport under my family name, which allowed her to move around freely. It allowed her to make arrangements to leave with her family for Belgium. It also forced Natasha to learn English.

The ease with which we managed to get Natasha permanent residence in New Zealand and subsequently get a passport after just one year in the country, has never ceased to amaze me. Just one of those little mysteries, especially given we were in the midst of the Cold War.

Natasha and her family left for Europe towards the end of 1981, barely a year after they arrived.

We kept in sporadic contact until I left for a trip to Europe the next year. After a few days in England, I was met off the ferry by a surly Natasha and we spent a day or two together in Brussels. When I returned from a side trip she had disappeared off the radar completely for some years.

After many years of no contact, I tried reaching her in Belgium and managed to find her ex-husband, Tolya, who told me that Natasha had been very ill with pancreatitis and was now living in France. That was the only time we spoke. It transpired that Tolya had become an alcoholic.

In 2007, when I returned to Moscow with Henry Wrassky I had the opportunity to see Natasha again in Moscow. We met several times and I was dragged around various places, including to a bank to sort out Zhenya's tax. She treated me to a lavish lunch at the opulent Cafe Pushkin.

After spending some time in Poland and visiting my old friend, Gerti, in Bamberg, Germany, Natasha was kind enough to pay for a trip down to see her in the Cote d'Azur.

When we met, our meeting was filled with warmth and amiability. It resembled more a family reunion than a meeting between estranged spouses. We shared many recollections. We did a promenade together around the peninsular of Saint-Jean-Cap-Ferrat, which was somewhat reminiscent of the old times in Sumner.

I was met like a long-lost friend and treated with characteristic generosity even if the *quid pro quo* was to accompany Natasha in her large Mercedes (playing CDs with old crooners like Dean Martin) on long shopping trips. We did a wonderful - but over-long, and very tiring, day trip along the Cote d'Azur, through Monaco and Menton to Italy, where we had dinner.

I met Zhenya (Eugenia), who was living in Monaco and working for Credit Suisse, catering to the needs of Russian millionaires who needed a place to park their money and perhaps even launder it. This was in 2007, in the heady days before the 2008 financial meltdown.

I have often wondered what has happened to them in the days since then, but apart from one solitary phone call when Pam spoke to her, Natasha has once again disappeared off the radar although Zhenya has come out of the woodworks a couple of times, usually, I suspect, when they want something of me. One request was to help get Natasha's mother's body back, but by that time I was already unwell and so, unable to help.



An escape: Natasa on the West Coast of New Zealand, 1970



On Red Square, 1979



From the days of international telegrams: exams passed



Natasja and Robin at the Leningrad Palace of Weddings

What follows are some unedited extracts from the diary I kept on my last visit in 2008

August 2008, Provence

Une villa au Meditteranee!



Natasha and Robin on the Cote d'Azur, 2007

I think I really have to pinch myself – a completely different world from Bamberg. 9.30 and already the thermometer says 27° C!

Cypress trees and tall hills, covered with buildings that are as reminiscent of Italy as France. Cicadas sing shorter notes here I think.

Was met at the airport after a bit of a wait by Natasha – an undersized person in an oversized Mercedes. In the old days, she couldn't drive. The airport seemed empty and provincial, but apparently, it's the second biggest in France. I wasn't that impressed by what was on offer in Frankfurt and Zurich. Nothing much to eat – but Swiss chocolate and Moevenpick ice cream on the Swissair flight.

I met Zhenya and her daughter, and although the conversation was pleasant, there was a slight awkwardness on my part, likely due to fatigue. It appeared that Zhenya also experienced symptoms of chronic fatigue, as she slept a lot and didn't spend much time in the office.

More later...

After a slow start took off with Natasha to Eze, a small village between here (St Jean Cap Ferra) and Monaco. Situated on steep slopes of 400 m – it has a church with narrow winding paths leading up to a fortress. The Romans were here but present structures date back to the 14th century. It belonged to Provence and then to the Kings of Savoy and then to France. A lot of time in highbrow shops and art galleries. Down below the park, there is a perfume factory and museum. Apparently, all French perfume comes from grasses that grow nearby – this is the source.

Shades of the old Natasha – in and out of shops, looking at all the beautiful things. In the evening a nice one-and-a-half-hour walk around the peninsular of Cap Ferra. All are slightly reminiscent of Scarborough and Flowers Track etc.

In Eze that is an expensive hotel with the customer's luggage carried by donkeys.

It has been an adjustment – from Gerti's flat in Bamberg to this amazing rented flat on the Cote d'Azur. Natasha had two women, one, Raiya, a Chechen, I think, and the other one looking after the wee girl, Nastya (Anastasia Charlotte). Zhenya works for a local branch of Credit Suisse and works with the rich Russians who live here, bringing business to the bank. She obviously earns well (she has brought some millions of euros to her employer). She had separated from Nastya's father in Moscow, who found it hard to accept that Zhenya was earning several times more than he was. She studied economics at Brussels University and Russian politics at the London School of Economics. Since I knew them in Brussels, when they were struggling to keep themselves going they have lived in Switzerland, London, Moscow – and now the Cote d'Azur. As I understand it Natasha is following Zhenya and running her own travel business from wherever. Natasha has someone, who she describes as being like a son, running a bureau in St Petersburg and specialising in tours from Europe with the cultural theme. She has her own guides and she gets referrals from European travel agencies and she pays them.

Feel exhausted today after a rough day yesterday. We met up with Natasha's Georgian friends and drove to Menton, home at some stage to Katherine Mansfield, we looked around this amazing old town – the last town before one hits the Italian border. Lots of photos, lots of waiting while certain people did the shops. A good proportion of the day was devoted to shopping.

We then went to a cafe to have tea in the most amazing array of cakes and sweets et cetera. One piece would have been enough for the sweet tooth, but we had to sample everything. By this time would have been ready to turn around, but no, onwards to Italy, on to San Remo in Italy. More shopping, a little bit of sightseeing – by this time I could hardly care less. And then to cap it off, after all the wonderful eateries on the street which we bypassed we went to some expensive cafe. More tea with pastries! By this time I was feeling pretty pissed off. Then back to the car, a large Mercedes that doesn't fit the roads here and a long trip back, and yet another walk around a night bazaar in Menton. By the time we got back, it was 12:30 a.m. and I was stuffed.

Today I think I am suffering, primarily from the diet. Tired and a little depressed – need space, simplicity and hanker for home, or at least Birling Place....

Similarly, there would be announcements such as “*After dinner we will drive up to the village*”, – and then nothing would happen. Then yesterday I was told we were going to the beach only to find we were going on a shopping expedition instead. I have spent a lot of time waiting while Natasha disappears into a shop to look at shoes, onions, or whatever, I have found it all a bit claustrophobic, unnerving and frustrating. There is an uncomfortable feeling of being dependent on someone else, to go somewhere, when and if they want.

This on the one hand. But on the other, the unbounded generosity of paying for my ticket, taking me around, offering the most incredible delicacies – champagne, all sorts of French breads and sweets, being on the beach with its chaises longues and glasses of wine, orange juice etc. It cost 40 euros a day just to sit on the beach.

All of this has brought up feelings of inadequacy and frustration – most of all, not really being my own person. So while I know I should be grateful and happy, I feel under pressure

Apart from anything else, observing the life of the well-off is not a comfortable experience – all the expensive cars, rich food, the throwaway society, all the talk of who has what, expensive cars, jobs, helicopters to St Tropez. It is, to put it extremely mildly, unsustainable. On Saturday, when I went shopping with Natasha in her Mercedes, forgetting to take with her any bags from home – all the unnecessary expenditure, the use of plastic bags – all produced a sense of despair.

Natasha appears to possess a strong presence and charisma that attracts people to her. When conversing with locals in French, there seems to be a good connection. She demonstrates a genuine belief in spirituality, embracing both Eastern and Western perspectives. Her admiration for Alexandra David-Neel and interest in energetic medicine, particularly NAET, is evident. During our time together, I demonstrated some basic muscle testing, which has prompted Natasha to search for local NAET practitioners online. It's worth noting that Zhenya is currently dealing with chronic fatigue and is unable to work, experiencing classic symptoms associated with CFS and candida. Hopefully, someone in the vicinity will be able to provide assistance and support to Zhenya in her health journey.

Her wee daughter, Nastya, is delightful and bright for her age; perhaps I should think of myself as some sort of “would-be” Grandad!! All in all, there is some familiarity, but in general a very different world from what I'm used to!

Chapter 5 - The early 1980's

After Natasha left in August 1981 I was able to start rebuilding my life.

I was living at home in Sumner with my parents. In some ways this was a happy time of my life; it was very settled and I enjoyed life with Mum and Dad.

Needing something to get absorbed into other than work, which wasn't too stimulating or interesting, I started to learn German. I absorbed right into it, learning some conversational German, absorbing books in German that I used to read, and lying on my mother's *chaise longue* in the sunroom, which had wonderful views out towards Christchurch and the Southern Alps. I used to read whole books, starting off looking up many words in the dictionary, and finally getting on better as I went on.

Around this time, I discovered the Goethe Society and the wonderful Elsie Walker who ran it. There were regular meetings held in the Arts Centre. We used to have singsongs and during this time I met some wonderful German friends and extended my ability in speaking German.

Joachim was in the country at the time studying at Lincoln College. Horst was there, working as a glazier and met Kate from Timaru whom he went on to marry later. The Giessen brothers - Alexander and Theo - arrived to set up a winery at Burnham, just outside Christchurch, which was something quite new at the time.

My most significant meeting was with Gerti Bayer and her friend Inge Hoefer, who were both in New Zealand doing practical work towards their diploma in social work at Bamberg University. I remember clearly the evening at the Goethe Society when Gerti and I first met. It was one of those magical moments when we noticed each other from opposite ends of the small room, through a crowd of people, and gravitated towards each other.

My mother at this time had just been diagnosed with breast cancer, had had a radical mastectomy, and needed help while she recovered. Gerti, who was staying at the YMCA, needed somewhere to live so I mentioned this to her and she agreed without hesitation and came to live with me and my parents.

My parents and Gerti hit it off immediately. Gerti, coming from a large family, knew how to fit in and to work. My parents, especially my Mum, loved her and I know the feeling was mutual. Amongst other things, she spent many hours darning my father's socks and even his underwear.

Gerti and I developed a close friendship and did many things together, including doing a memorable trip to Arthur's Pass in my Mum's Morris Minor with her friend Inge. I was introduced by them to the wonderful Jazz Cellar in the Arts Centre, at the site of the old University. I remember seeing all the young people dancing, bobbing up and down, something that reminded me of the Muppets.

Through Gerti I learnt the art of keeping a diary and journaling, recording thoughts and feelings, rather than just what I had done that day.

Our friendship opened up new horizons and brought new discoveries that felt much more wholesome than the very fraught relationship with my ex-wife.

Eventually, Gerti and Inge left to go home to Germany and I started to plot an overseas trip to Europe. Although many prices were high, including phone calls and plane trips, everything seem possible and within a few months, even on my meagre salary, I had earned enough for the trip, helped to a great degree by the fact that my brother Jeremy, through his job at Air New Zealand was able to secure very cheap air tickets to Europe, although, as recorded elsewhere there is a bit of a backstory to this.



Robin and Gerti at Arthur's Pass, 1980



My mother in a photo taken on the Port Hills, 1979



My father on the Port Hills, 1979



Mum and Dad on their verandah



My father resting on the verandah at 8 Whitewash Head Road, Sumner



The captain on the bridge: 8 Whitewash Head Road, Sumner

Chapter 6 - Travels in Europe, 1982-3



The Bamberg Rathaus

I flew to London with my brother Jeremy via a short transit in Singapore at a brand-new Changi airport, that had not even yet been officially opened.

Natasha had requested I bring her stereo, which she had had to leave behind when she left New Zealand because she was seriously overweight with her luggage. She had left it for safekeeping with Jeremy. But he had sold it, without telling me or her, and I ended up having to buy a replacement at a much higher cost. When I confronted him, Jeremy - who had, in Russia, been showered with gifts and never had to pay for anything - told me: *"You don't owe her anything."*

London's cold and slushy weather didn't leave a favourable impression on me, except for perhaps the first day or so. I was eager to continue my journey and cross over to the continent, feeling a sense of restlessness and anticipation.

It's fascinating now, to look back on my diaries from the period. Throughout, there are entries such as:

"Don't really feel like the social contacts, like a dinner in London. Would rather be on the continent for a real New Year... Didn't feel, in part, a festive spirit and was a little out of my element – would

rather be with my own people – nothing quite like a Russian New Year...Felt relieved, really to get away from Birling – don't quite fit into that scene somehow".

It was all quite self-absorbed and full of me feeling somehow out of sorts and not fitting in, wherever I was.

After leaving Birling I travelled up to London and took the train and ferry to Belgium, where I was met by a stony-faced Natasha. We spent a day or so together in Brussels. I stayed in a separate flat she had found for me and which I had to myself. I then hitched (for the first time) from Brussels to Paris and spent a couple of days "doing" Paris, revisiting some of the places that were familiar to me from my earlier trip in 1978.

After a couple of days, it was upwards and onwards, by fast train to Strasbourg.

By joining an organisation called SERVUS I was able to be hosted by people in various places, and stayed with a family in Strasbourg. I found it quite magical, with lots of snow and a beautiful old city, and I remember climbing up the icy steps of the spire of the famous cathedral.

For a colonial from 'down under' living on an island, crossing a border was a fascinating experience. I crossed the border by suburban bus (recorded as costing 2F) from Strasbourg to Kehl in Germany, 500 metres across the Rhine. I was so fascinated that I crossed again on foot to post a letter in France. It gave me a real buzz to cross a border on foot and hear two different languages - French and German - spoken! I then changed money and bought a 22 DM ticket to Neustadt In the Rheinland Pfalz, where I visited my friend Joachim, who was staying with his parents in the small and picturesque winegrowing village of St Martin.

From there, I hitched a ride to Bamberg and I arrived in the fabulous mediaeval town in snow-beautiful conditions. I stayed with three girls, Gerti, Inge and Ute, in their wonderful student flat on the second floor of #3 Fischstrasse. I shared a room with Gerti which, looking back, was a pretty hard ask. I'm sure Gerti quickly got quite irritated by having me in her space.

It's interesting looking back at my diaries. I was so self-obsessed and constantly worried about the relationship with Gerti, in between bottles of German beer:

"Our relationship, I find, is not as close as it was – Gerti said she felt 'getrennt' (separated)- but I find still that we have a good relationship– quieter and much less tense"

In hindsight, it all sounds like wishful thinking. The other thing that obsessed me and which I wrote about constantly, was the cost of things – how much this cost and how much that cost. It was all recorded in great detail.

More...

"Gerti and I are finally able to communicate and the result is that it turns out that Gerti feels hemmed in by me, by my constant attention and pressure, that I have a "fixation." I then thought about three possibilities: a) continue the same b) moved to Inge's room (!) or c) move away. I

decided that moving away would be “opting out”.

How self-absorbed I was!

Finally, things eased up a little when I found a bit of independence, going out to teach English to Frau Bauling, visiting my friends in Denmark, and visiting my friend Joachim for the Fasching Festival.

Once, when Gerti was away I met Gabi Schubert. Gabi had just finished a relationship and we were immediately attracted to each other. Finally, I had met someone else, Gabi. Gerti seemed relieved.

Gabi was more straightforward than Gerti ...

“I find it wonderful to have someone who obviously finds something in me, and who trusts me and finds it pleasant to be in my company. I find Gabi gentle, unassuming, quiet, un-nervous but enthusiastic and fully delightful”.

I’m sure a relationship with some steamy sex helped things and made me feel better about myself for a while.

Shortly afterwards, as spring was approaching, I set off on my own trip to Munich. My SERVUS host introduced me to a Russian man, Zhenya, who invited me to move in. He helped me buy a beaten old (and rusty) VW, which I drove back through the streets of Munich on a hair-raising trip, driving for the first time on the right-hand side of the road, to Zhenya’s place. I made it.

I then drove back to Bamberg for a visit and arranged for Gabi to travel down to Munich.

When she arrived, I was pretty devastated to find that she had called off the relationship, saying that, *“our relationship brought back memories of her ex-boyfriend Herbert,”* with whom she had previously broken up.

I set off with Gabi's friend, Elfi, for Greece on a memorable trip through Austria to Ljubljana in Slovenia and then through the heartland of Bosnia, wonderful places which were later destroyed in the Bosnian war in the 1990s. Yugoslavia, at that time, was still intact. Tito had died not long ago, and everything looked pretty good. We had great adventures in the VW as we travelled from Ljubljana, through Bosnia-Herzegovina to Greece. I remember us running out of money, and almost out of petrol in the middle of the mountains of Montenegro, in a place called Ivangrad. As I recall, we borrowed some money to fill the car up. This is one of the strangest and most menacing places I have been.



35 years later: Robin and Gerti in Bamberg, 2007

Arriving finally, in Skopje, we made a rush to successfully change money before the banks closed and ended up at a bar where we met some Macedonians who invited us back to their flat for the night. We found our way up the stairs of the multi-storey apartment block in the pitch dark to their flat. Elfi was fearful that something was going to befall us. Nothing did, and we got up early the next morning to get onto the road to Greece. After a while, it started to rain heavily but the windscreen wipers were seized up from rust. I recall steering the car in driving rain with one hand, and a rolled-up newspaper in the other, acting as a wiper so I could see the road ahead,

Crossing over to Greece, we had the windscreen wipers fixed. The workman burned the rust off, something that was even by then unknown in Germany. We crossed over the mountains of northern Greece, travelled down the east coast and crossed by ferry to the Peloponnese Peninsula. On our arrival in Olympia, Elfi met up with her friends and we parted company.

I drove on to new adventures, staying in Athens with a young man, Adonis - another SERVUS host - and his mother.

Finally, I left by ship for Israel. I had prearranged in New Zealand to work on a kibbutz, Ramat Yohanan, near Haifa. I hated the work on the kibbutz, as well as the lifestyle of the volunteers, and disliked the Israelis (not without reason).

Looking back on my old diary entries from 1982 is instructive, because it gives my first impressions of the Israeli state. There are many things I could talk about but this trip was seminal and shaped my attitudes towards Israel. In most instances, travel can remove prejudices, but Israel was an exception. I arrived feeling neutral or even sympathetic, but left the country hostile.

It was my first education on the plight of the Palestinians.

This is my diary entry:

As we approached Haifa a patrol boat approached, and then a second, with searchlights. The lights on the patrol boat went off and for approximately 15 minutes circled around. Then Customs and Immigration came on board. The Police landed and there were several plainclothes police on the boat.

We were asked to go below deck for passport control which took place in the dining room and we waited in the heat for each group of 6 to 7 people to be let through. A plainclothes policeman, with a pistol, was outside in the vestibule and controlled the numbers coming through. After a half hour's wait, it was finally my turn and I was seated at a desk with an immigration officer who asked how much money I had, and how long I intend to stay and then stamped the entry form.

Problems began when I went through with Karsten. He told me Alphonso was having problems. Being a holder of a Spanish passport he required a visa but he didn't have one. He admitted to not having the money to support himself, so could not get a visa. Karsten offered to give him some money so we were told the authorities would have to be consulted, and we should wait in the customs area and we would be told of the decisions. We were already last off the boat, and when we came off there stood a policeman collecting passport receipt forms. I couldn't find mine. I'm sure it was not given back to me in passport control; I had it before that. The policeman was rude and would not let me off the boat without it so I went back again. The immigration process had already finished. I was given another form by a ship's crew member, stamped. This was not accepted, so I had to go back and wait while the immigration man went about getting a new card for me.

By this time, we were the very last off the boat and had to hurry to the customs area to change money and take a taxi to the youth hostel, which cost 100 shekels. There were no metres and drivers set their own price. I was very lucky to be able to get a place on the floor at the very full hostel. Everyone else on the ship had got there before us. Alphonso had been refused permission to remain in Israel and had to remain on board the ship until the Monday sailing and return to Greece. The poor, naive 18-year-old was not told by anyone that he needed a visa. He thought that being a resident of Switzerland would be taken into account. And it's impossible to come to a country without money, especially if one attracts attention to oneself.

So that was Israel. I wondered where I had come to. The first impression was of rude, unfriendly Israelis, which was not altogether without basis, and of a police state obsessed with red tape, and with fear of terrorism and security.

About life in the kibbutz, I wrote:

"Since being here I have withdrawn, in many ways, into myself. I do not find that there are many people to whom I can relate."

Mostly, I remember people being there just to have a good time, working during the morning, swimming etc. in the afternoon and drinking lots of beer.

One of the characters I remember was Bob, an English guy from Yorkshire who:
"is mostly drinking beer, has tattoos on his arms and a long moustache. He is a Royal Marine and has the political views to go with it."

There were a couple of New Zealanders, from Wellington:
"Tony Adams, a little snobbish and about as interesting as most New Zealanders!"

The daily routine at the kibbutz started by being woken up at 4:30 a.m, dragging myself to the bathroom to splash water over my face, then over to the dining room for a few bits of bread and coffee - (*"thank God for Turkish coffee!!"*).

We were then transported down to work, usually picking oranges or grapefruit, between 5.30 and 8. 00 am, then back for a breakfast of egg and coffee, and back to picking until about 11 a.m. It was very hot from about 11 o'clock onwards and I was very tired by the time I finished. The rest of the day we were free just to hang out, swim in the swimming pool, visit Haifa etc.

After about three weeks, I decided to leave the kibbutz. I left suddenly after the first work period, without telling anybody.

I wrote:

I am not cut out for this type of work;

- 1. I am an individualist and can get on only with a limited number of people at any one time. I like to be 'getrennt' to some.*
- 2. I do not like Israel and I do not like the Israelis.*
- 3. I cannot but feel antipathy towards these arrogant people who, having been oppressed in the past, have now come to Palestine and themselves become oppressors.*
- 4. I dislike the relationship of the kibbutzniks towards volunteers. It is unfriendly and arrogant – "Do this, do that". Some of the faces remind me of military people. In fact, the military is everywhere. Even on the kibbutz one sees people with guns. Soldiers are omnipresent. Had the impression from the start of arriving in a "Fortress State" – I cannot sympathise with Jewish hegemony."*

In my diary, I describe people on the kibbutz – such as the unsmiling face of the foreman:

“ the military man in charge of haymaking on my last day, who ranted and raved and dealt with everyone as an army sergeant would with his private.”

The friendly people were all Arabs. They are the ones who wish to talk and will approach you on the street and say hello.

“The Israelis are all stony-faced people who never smile and dislike having anything to do with people different from themselves”... The unfriendly Germans are much easier to get on with”.

I reasoned to myself that working as a volunteer implied that I was a supporter of the state of Israel and felt that I neither wanted to work for nothing, nor to support what I now saw as a militarist state by giving my labour free.

Also present was my constant restlessness and desire to “*get on the road*” and back to Europe.

I remember the only public holiday when I was there – April 28, Independence Day. Everything reminded me of celebrations like May Day in the Soviet Union. The only difference was the flags weren't red, but the Israeli blue and white.

I have since learnt from a Russian Jewish friend in Wellington, Vadim, that while the Bolsheviks went on to rule Russia, the Mensheviks moved to Palestine and founded the kibbutz movement. The Russian, or rather, Soviet influence was everywhere. Discussing this years later with Vadim, who had started out as a Zionist believer, I found that he too, had left Israel out of very similar considerations.

My peak experience in Israel, and possibly on the whole trip, was the short time I spent in Jerusalem. I took a room in an Arab hotel by the Jaffa Gate and spent a whole day exploring the Old City and Gethsemane. By the evening, I was feeling pretty lonely and went looking for somewhere to eat. But it was the start of the Sabbath and eating places were, at least in theory, closed. I finally found one, but as it was a holiday no money could be exchanged, and I had to buy coupons at the back of the restaurant which were exchanged for food and drink. All this was to avoid the rules about not exchanging money on the Sabbath.

I met a couple of friendly Germans over dinner who ‘adopted’ me and we arranged to meet up the next day so I could join them on their drive out to Bethlehem.

When I got back to my hotel, I had a lovely interaction with one of the young Palestinians there who invited me back for the weekend to visit his parents on the West Bank. This, no doubt would have been a peak experience but I decided that rather than let my two tipsy German friends down, I should stick to the original plan. I could easily have reneged on the deal, but stupidly I didn't.

That decision was one of the biggest regrets in my life.

Leaving Israel proved as difficult as getting in:

"I walked to the dock where I found a mass of young people waiting. Waited for half an hour to have tickets checked, then moved around to Immigration, which was locked and had to wait again in the sun before being let in to queue for passport control. Sheer bloody-mindedness and quite on purpose. Overall the whole operation took 1 1/2 to 2 hours. I have never known a country more difficult to get out of, even the USSR. Emigration people checked their lists of people before stamping passports – to see if I was a “terrorist”?!"

Was this my first foretaste of the post-9/11 world?

I instantly found it to be a relief to be on the boat back to Greece.

Upon my return to Athens, I once again stayed with my SERVAS host, Adonis. I recall his remarkable interactions with his mother, their conversations oscillating between hushed whispers interspersed by sudden bursts of high-pitched screams. They seemed to run the full gamut of emotions in seconds.

I spent some more time in Athens, meeting new people through Andonis, including Kostas, with whom I became on friendly terms; he moved to Los Angeles not long after I got home to New Zealand.

Looking back now, I can see that by five to six months into my trip the tide had changed and I had started to feel less well, and less comfortable within myself.

I left Athens to go back to a previous New Zealand contact in Evia and found myself cold-shouldered. My approach was always to move on, so I drove on right up the east coast of Greece until I reached Thessaloniki.

I was offered the chance to visit a special religious festival by meeting a Greek hitchhiker in Thessaloniki but left because I was feeling sick, affected by the heat, with a headache and aching limbs. In normal circumstances, one might hole up in a hotel but I was panicking over whether I had enough money to get myself back to Germany.

I decided to leave, with the locals thinking I was mad to leave the festivities, and drove onwards to a Bulgarian border which I crossed in the dark. I slept in the car somewhere for the night, anxious about the police turning up, but nothing happened and I drove on to Sofia the next morning. I always picked up hitchhikers on the way and often learnt a lot from them.

I found Sofia to be a fascinating city, but once again felt headachey and weak, and I once again moved on and drove across the Yugoslav border, to Belgrade. Finding the youth hostel full, I went to a pub across the road and got drinking with an old guy called Mirka, who said: *“Next time you come back and stay with me”*. I replied: *“ I don’t have anywhere to stay tonight”*. So, for the price of one cognac, he invited me home.

He woke me up at 3.30 and again at 6.00. After a breakfast of bread-and-butter, *left with the old man driving*.

"A very impulsive driver using one hand, the other to nudge me, squeeze my side et cetera. Stopped about three times, the cognacs, something to drink et cetera."

This next story is fascinating so I will let my diary tell it in full.

"We picked up a hitchhiker, Steve along the way, a young chap from Liverpool, travelling to Holland from Greece after spending eight months in Crete. We were to stay together for two days. We then picked up a Yugoslav man who wanted to travel to Banska Luka, who turned out to be working for the passport office of the Interior Ministry and was a rather nasty type. At his suggestion, we stopped for a woman, a Yugoslav from Belgrade, travelling to Zagreb. She started talking of shortages of goods, toilet paper, coffee etc. She wanted to leave Yugoslavia because of personal difficulties with her parents and couldn't travel because the authorities wouldn't give her a passport for political reasons.

"The man on the back kissed her a few times and made a pass at her as it turned out. He said that he would be able to get her a passport for the cost of a 15,000 dinar bribe plus her body. When at last the man got out she told us the whole story.

"She was well-travelled and had been to England, America, except that now, for certain reasons she was being denied a passport and was desperate to leave the country. She proposed marriage to Steve. She would pay him 200 Canadian dollars and they could divorce immediately. Poor Steve. I don't think he had ever quite come up against this sort of thing and was embarrassed. He said he had "no time" to get married. He asked me a little later what he should do!"

We arrived in Zagreb and had a hearty meal of pork chops before venturing out to explore the city. We found ourselves drawn to the central square, which was adorned with vibrant decorations for the carnival celebration. As we immersed ourselves in the festive atmosphere, we discovered that the carnival coincided with Tito's birthday, adding an extra layer of significance to the event. Mesmerised by the lively carnival procession, Steve and I savoured the experience before continuing our journey towards Maribor.

Such restlessness!

Along the way, we stumbled upon a quaint village nestled halfway between Zagreb and Maribor. Exhausted and in need of rest, we sought accommodation for the night but found no suitable options. Eventually, we stumbled on a rock concert and decided to pause and enjoy the music for a while. However, as fatigue took its toll, we made the joint decision to leave and retreated to a secluded side road. It became our makeshift resting place for the night, and so we spent an uncomfortable night in the car.

I was awoken in the middle of the night by Steve who said he was sure there were people outside but we went back to sleep. At approximately 5 a.m., we were woken again and this time we were disturbed. There were four young men in a Zastava - a Yugoslav Bambina - all very drunk, and one, the driver, aggressive. They asked for our documents. We refused; I answered in Russian, which may have been a mistake. They answered sometimes in German and then in Croatian. They said they would call the militia. When I wouldn't take the bait they became aggressive, and at one time I thought they would turn the car over. One of them struggled with Steve to get a side window open, and then they went around and tampered with the motor.

Again, they demanded documents, so I presented them with my youth hostel card, which seemed to satisfy them, for they went back to the car then quickly returned and demanded Steve's passport. The second guy quietened the driver down. We gave them a cigarette then after a while, we drove off.

They chased us for several kilometres and tried to overtake us, but naturally the Zastava was no match for a Beetle and we eventually lost them.

My next drama arose from the fact that my car only had temporary registration for Germany. I had kept up insurance but the registration had expired. When we got to the Austrian border by Maribor, we were turned back because the car's papers were not valid.

After paying for another temporary Yugoslav visa we decided to have another go, this time travelling 180 km to the Italian frontier. This time, the Italian border guards did not like Steve's long hair and asked where we were going, why we turned back at the other frontier, and how much money we had. Finally they asked for our papers. Tired and frustrated, I objected and asked 'Why?! The answer was a very definitive one. The border guard showed me his handcuffs and said, "Yugoslavia!"

So back we headed, and were given another visa by the Yugoslavs.

We drove on to Ljubljana, by this time, absolutely exhausted, hungry and bad tempered, frustrated and wondering what to do next. I dropped Steve off at the railway station, where he bought a ticket to Villach in Austria. We parted. Steve was heading towards Amsterdam.

"Again, having nowhere to stay, I decided to have another attempt at the Austrian border. "Very tired, frustrated and nervous and the car going badly to boot, on regular Yugoslav petrol. Hardly made it up the mountainside... Through Yugoslav control... to the Austrian frontier. 'Autopapiere bitte' ('your papers please'). A desperate feeling of despair as I handed them over but was surprised when he said 'bitte' ('please'). I could hardly believe it and could have cried for joy as I made my way over to the bank to change my last dinars into Austrian schillings.

I made my way down to Villach, where I found a near-empty youth hostel and a normal bed at last. A most frustrating Sunday was at last over!"

My frustrations were not over, however, as I found the car wouldn't start and had to get it towed away to be fixed. This used up the last of my remaining money, so I had to ring my sister Kathy in England who sent some money over by telex.

After leaving Villach and again sleeping in the car for the night, I made my way to Salzburg where I can remember buying tickets for a movie on a brilliantly clear day. As I was the only person, they cancelled the showing.

I tried crossing over the border into Germany. This time, the German border control would not let me go forward or back so I had to spend the night in my car again at a busy border crossing and take a taxi to the closest town to get my papers put in order, which meant

spending yet more money on car registration.

I drove on to Munich. Finding nobody at home, I drove on to Bamberg, now essentially doing my journey in reverse. In Bamberg, I went straight to see my friend Gabi, who did not look the slightest surprised to see me.

“After eating something we went out, up to Spezikeller (an outdoor pub) for a beer and met up with Elfi, with whom I had travelled down to Greece, and some of her friends. Gabi was somewhat distant and didn’t want to be too close, difficulty expressing her feelings, but definitely felt that our relationship had been on a false footing from the start – never really got around to discovering how we stood in our relationship to one another.”

One thing that impressed me and stayed with me is when I asked Elfi: “*How are you?*” She responded honestly and directly with: “*Danke, schlecht - thank you, bad*”. refreshing departure from the lazy ways of New Zealanders.

As she was off the next morning, I went straight to the Fischstrasse to see Gerti and to spend a few days with her parents in Kerbfeld, a village not too far from Bamberg.

From here it was just like a journey in reverse. With the onset of the hot weather, I started to feel unwell and my last diary entry of my trip was on 3 June:

“The weather has been very hot for the last few days and seems to affect my constitution – feel weak, sleepy and generally very lazy, also depression has come on. I feel sad without any basis, is this anything to do with the weather?”

I drove straight through, with a brief stop in Essen to see the two men I had met in Jerusalem. I didn't even stop in Holland, but drove straight through Belgium to the ferry and crossed over to England.

Always that habit of moving on.

I was relieved to be back in the embrace of my family again and to enjoy some home comforts with my sister Kathy. I briefly tried a job picking strawberries in East Malling nearby and cycled there every day. But I could never pick the strawberries that were bound for Covent Garden quickly enough, nor in the prescribed way, which was to hide the poorer fruit underneath with the largest and most delectable strawberries on top. In addition, it always started raining just before lunchtime so I would go home, by which time it had cleared, but I didn't go back. So I didn't make much money but I did spend a lot of time resting on my bed, reading Herman Hesse and other books.

I did my only trip in Britain then. I went to pick up my German friend, Joachim in Poole, Dorset. Together we travelled in my rusty old VW down to Devon. We stopped in a place called Beer, which ironically had no beer and only served steak and chips, or steak and Pomme Frites, or steak and French fries.

Mum and Dad came over for a month or so and we drove down as a family to see my cousin Rosy, who had travelled with Kathy and me to my wedding in Leningrad. Rosy had

arranged for a healer to see my Mum, who was anxious about a return of her breast cancer. I was oblivious to the fact that Mum had not recovered from her breast cancer and that in a year or so, it would come back with a vengeance. I wasn't privy to the proceedings with the healer - it all seemed to happen quietly - but I remember her telling Mum that if she drank a glass of vodka a day she would be all right.

My parents, probably rather inadvisedly, agreed to a trip to Germany and France with me in my beaten-up old VW. My Mum was in the passenger seat and my Dad in the back. We had a small drama crossing the border into Germany, encountering the officious German *polizei*, who insisted I had to renew my papers. We travelled on, down the Rhine and stayed in the B & B run by my friend, Joachim's parents for a night. And then on to Heidelberg, and from there to Würzburg and on to my beloved Bamberg. I remember my father looking rather puzzled as he asked where this place "*Ausfahrt*" ('Exit') was that he kept on seeing!

Gerti met my parents with open arms.

After a tour of my favourite town in Europe, we travelled up to Kerbfeld to stay with Gerti's parents. With one side having no English and the other side no German, there was nevertheless a lot of warmth as two old foes met and compared notes through an interpreter.

On returning to Bamberg, there was a tearful farewell from Gerti. Perhaps she felt she would never see them again?

We set off on what was to be an amazing journey back to England - the last trip I would ever do with my mother and father. We travelled up the Main Valley to Heidelberg, where we met my friend, Joachim. I'm not sure how my father felt; he was probably a little lost. But Mum was in her element. She found that she had lost hardly any of the German she'd learnt 20 years before, and thoroughly enjoyed exploring the streets of Heidelberg.

From there, we drove to the French border. I recall having great fun with the French bodyguard who kept asking: "*Ou sont votre papiers*" - "*Where are your papers*"? I would reply: "*These are the papers.*" He repeated the question several times, and I would repeat the same answer until, in his very Gallic manner, he shrugged his shoulders and waved us through.

I remember entering one or another French town, trying to find our way north. It was no easy matter getting out of town because all signs pointed towards Paris.

I remember us stopping in Arras, after passing through towns whose names recalled battles from World War I. We were walking through the square in Arras. My father must have felt insecure, for he held my mother's hand. It was a rare moment of tenderness; it was the first, and last time, I recall my parents holding hands. Because of what happened next, it was very moving and has remained in my memory ever since.

When we arrived in Calais my father was convinced that Kathy was coming over with the

children to collect him. Nothing we can say could convince him otherwise. We put him on the ferry to England where he was met by Kathy and joined the family for a holiday to Scotland before returning to New Zealand before us.

My mother and I started a road trip together in France. It was full of meaning for me, for this was our very last protracted time together. We stayed in a hotel room in Calais, where I recall that nothing in the bathroom worked properly. However, there was a beautiful statue in the room. It was so very French.

We set off together for Paris and took a room in the same hotel in St. Georges where Mum, Jeremy, Kathy and I had stayed, earlier, in 1978.

I remember spending a pleasant day wandering around Paris visiting many of the places we had visited four years earlier.

The most amazing thing was that I drove my beaten-up old green VW through Paris just as I had in Athens. We would plot our journey on the map then find that we were stuck in the one-way system. I would ask my mother, who was incapable of following any directions or reading a map, to navigate in Paris! That was my Mum, who would always turn in the wrong direction when she got out of a lift. We got a parking ticket in Paris with a message from the police saying: *"You are in contravention of the law. Seeing you are a visitor in our city we will overlook this"*.

I could not imagine anything similar in this country!

We had made plans for a holiday together in the Dordogne, over 300 km to the south. We headed off together and I recall that we made it at least as far as Orleans. We stayed somewhere nearby – I can't remember where it was – in a small town. I remember it being very noisy – there was always a lot of traffic, and compared it unfavourably with Germany, which was always much quieter, even in the bigger towns.

Without explanation, I felt symptoms of unbearable sadness that I had no explanation for, come on, and a feeling of not being able to cope any more. With a shoulder to lean on, I simply collapsed emotionally and explained that I couldn't go on. My dear mother was amazingly understanding and gave up on our plans for a holiday in the Dordogne, and we started our trip north to Paris, stopping for a brief halt in Rambouillet.

On our return to Paris we went to the Gare du Nord to buy a rail ticket for Mum to return to England. When we got back to the car we found that it had been broken into and all Mum's luggage had been stolen. It was a terrible setback for her, especially coming right at the end of our trip. The Parisians were very kind to her. She would always find contact with people by talking to their dogs, and people would usually open up. I remember us going into a pharmacy; when my mother told her story, the shopkeeper explained how she, herself, had been locked out of her flat without keys or documents, and gave my mother free samples of French perfume and makeup, which kept her going until she was able to find replacements with her insurance.

The women of Paris were not going to let my mother go without her makeup!

We parted ways in Paris. Mum took the train north back to England, and I drove east through Luxembourg to Germany, where I visited Joachim in Saarburg, where he had started his first teaching job. I stayed a day or so before continuing my journey back to Bamberg. There I finally parted company with my faithful green VW, which was sent "*Zum Schrott*" - "*to the wreckers*."

From Bamberg I hitched north, and headed back to England.



With my mother in Paris, 1992



Me and my trusty VW outside the Sorbonne, Paris, 1982

Chapter 7 - Life back in New Zealand

Having ditched my car and said farewell to my friends there I hitched northwards to Belgium to catch the ferry back to England. I was unable to get any response from Natasha and I thought that she had disappeared. It turned out that she and her family had gone on an extended holiday over the summer period.

I arrived in Dover early in the morning and had to wait quite some time for a lift but when I did, I was picked up by a young man who was going in the same direction and dropped me off in Birling village from where I was able to walk the short distance in time for breakfast. I hunkered down at Birling Place once again and then flew back home to New Zealand, ten months after I had first set off, with my mother.

My father had already returned home before this. Mum and I flew home via Los Angeles – it was the first and last time I have flown over the USA – I recall in the short time we had at the LA airport and always being exhorted to "*have a good day*"

I was depressed when we arrived back in New Zealand. I am sure that I would rather have gone back to Europe for all the challenges that that provided. I remember staying with my mother at Jeremy's place in Auckland and feeling thoroughly miserable. It was, as usual, a relief to return to the refuge of my parents' home in Sumner and to read books again, on my mother's chaise longue in the sunroom.

I had been away from work at the Department of Trade and Industry on unpaid leave for ten months and eventually, I had to return to reality. However, it was made clear to me that there was no job prospects in the Christchurch office. The expectation was that I would take up a position in head office to further my career in the Public Service.

Meantime, I had plenty of time to get up to mischief. I was introduced to another, this time, young) Russian girl, Alexandra, by my friend and Russian lecturer, Henry Wrassky - he was the one who had introduced me to Natasha. Once again, I became obsessed and started a new liaison.

I moved to Wellington from Christchurch and spent the first night at the Waterloo Hotel and then moved to the youth hostel before finding a basement flat on Glenmore Street. After Sumner, it was very cold and dank. I knew nobody and felt depressed enough to see the doctor and to go on dreadful antidepressant pills at the time. It turned out, Dr Velvin had prescribed lithium carbonate for me, which is for "*mood disorders*", such as bipolar condition. The same doctor stated when I asked him that "*There's only anecdotal evidence that food has anything to do with allergies*" (sic)

I was working in the Trade Services section of the Department of Trade and Industry, which was concerned with the promotion of New Zealand trade abroad. I worked in the Canadian section. This work, to say the least, did not catch my imagination. At the time they were promoting the export of all of our Orange Roughy fish to North America as if there was no tomorrow.

Now Orange Roughy is practically extinct.

The wonderful thing that I will remain eternally grateful to my parents for, is that they helped set me up with a home of my own. They provided money for a deposit for a house and we took out a lawyer's mortgage; the rates at the time were 18%! Unfortunately, in hindsight, they had their own ideas about where I should live and unfortunately, the semi detached flat in Island Bay that we had looked at together, which I quite liked, didn't come into their view of what was appropriate, so we ended up buying a sunless semi-detached flat in Broadmeadows instead.

I had regular trips back down to Christchurch to see my parents and they visited me on more than one occasion. When I went back home to Sumner for Christmas at the end of 1983, the family was together, as it turned out, for the last time.

I recall Kathy's family staying in the wonderful old stone house down the bottom of Whitewash Head Road. That house, in subsequent years, in an act of vandalism, was torn down. Jeremy and I stayed in the Sister Eveleen Retreat House next door.

This was the first time that Mum had seen Kathy's third child Georgie. She had spent many hours preparing a doll's house for Georgie, but unfortunately, she was not that interested and it got lost amongst all the other Christmas presents that year, something that hurt Mum.

Just before I was getting ready to leave to go back to Wellington, I went down into the garden with Mum to pick some roses. I didn't know at the time, but she felt very dizzy, and the next day went into hospital for tests. These showed that she had a secondary tumour in her brain. Later on, she revealed to me that at the time when she had scans done, she had an out-of-body experience. She explained that she had been drawn by the lights but had come back because she saw my father looking so helpless. For my mother this meant undergoing chemotherapy during which she lost all her hair she had taken such care of and had to wear a wig. I found out later that she had tried juicing and other alternative therapies, but sadly, the dye was cast and she didn't have more than 5 months to live.

I recall the day we returned home from the hospital after my mother's brain scans were done. While my family took refuge in glasses of gin, I felt a deep longing to be back at the hospital with my mother. I have no idea of their inner feelings, which they seemed unable to acknowledge. My father, brother, and sister sought refuge in their routines and activities while I found myself grappling with a sense of isolation and profound loneliness. It felt as though no one truly comprehended the depth of my emotions.

This is a feeling that has resurfaced many times throughout my life, and returns, even to this day.



This was my mother's last Christmas, in 1983, with granddaughters, Georgie and Anna

I went home to Wellington and went through the pretence of working. I wasn't at all prepared, in any way, emotionally, to go through this transition. I'm sure that I felt anaesthetised and disembodied for much of this time and did my work mechanically. I did, however, cherish my telephone conversations with Mum. She experienced exasperation with my father and his inability to accept her illness. He used to say, "*You won't get better unless you exercise*". In one of these conversations, Mum expressed a wish to do a trip with me to the centre of Australia

The illness however progressed quickly.

Losing my mother was like losing a confidant, someone that I could share what I was going through, my plans, my emotions etc.

There was nobody else in the family with whom I could share anything in anything the same way.

Chapter 8 - My Mother's Death



This is the last photo I have of my mother, taken in April, 1984

One day in May 1984, my brother, Jeremy gave me a ring at work to say that we had been summoned down to Christchurch. In those days there were indirect flights from Auckland and Christchurch, so that Jeremy could fly down and pick me up in Wellington and then we would fly down together to Christchurch.

We were picked up at the airport by our father and taken directly to the hospital.

Our mother was in bed. She had oedema in her ankles. I distinctly remember her explaining this and saying that she had chosen to die. I can't really remember any more of the conversation at the time – it was probably quite awkward, but after a while, Jeremy and Dad left and Mum and I were on our own. I remember saying to her "*I don't know what to say*", to which she said, "*There is nothing really much to say.*"

We must have spent quite a lot of time just in silence - perhaps I held her hand – I don't remember clearly. In any case, we were both able to say in our own way that we loved each other. When the time came for her to have her last meal I started to feed her; I distinctly remember her saying "*Don't force me*" with some humour.

At some stage soon my father came back to the hospital. Mum was obviously in pain and

my father held her while she had an injection of morphine. I am sure now, that she was given an overdose of morphine for very soon after that she went into a coma from which he never awoke. Nothing was ever said to me at the time – there was no explanation.

Dad must have gone home again, for I was left on my own with my mother. I sat with her for many hours into the night. I must have felt a lot of anxiety. I remember that her breath came infrequently and wondered whether each breath would be her last.

By this time it was long since dark and I was on my own with my mother. I must have at some stage fallen asleep in the chair alongside her.

After a good few hours – it might have been 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning, I was fetched and taken home. I don't remember whether someone stayed with her – perhaps my father – but I had a little bit of time to rest in bed. I probably didn't sleep. but still, during the hours of darkness, I drove in with Aunt Barbara driving her car extremely slowly between Redcliffs and the hospital with me following.

I spent the whole of the next day with Mum.

I remember Jeremy and my father at the hospital. My father insisted that Jeremy drive him to see Archdeacon Pastowe, presumably to make some sort of arrangements for the funeral. That meant Jeremy was taken out of the way at the time when my mum passed away.

I don't think that my brother has ever quite got over the fact that he was not there, but I think there is a reason for everything and for some reason, he was not meant to be present.

While I was sitting with Mum, her sister, my Aunt Pam arrived at the hospital. She had only recently lost her second husband who had died in bed alongside her. She was, at the time, the best person I could have had alongside me to help my mother make the transition from her body. I remember her talking to my mother, saying it was all right.

It was about four in the afternoon when Mum passed away.

A hospital nurse working in the cancer ward was able to talk us through the whole process and told us what to expect. The breaths were very infrequent but finally the "*death rattle*" came.

The sister was able to tell us that Mum had passed on.

What happened after that is a complete haze. I was feeling very numb and disconnected – and suddenly, very lonely. I did not feel at all supported by the rest of the family, or whoever was present. I was just alone with my own feelings

Having spent the last, almost, 24 hours with Mum, and having been at her side for much of that time and being present when she passed on I never saw her again. I never visited her

body in the funeral home and didn't realise the importance of that until later years. Besides which, I never had the opportunity. I had no choice but to just go along with the family. But what I did have was the chance to sit with my mother during her last hours.

The funeral happened at a crematorium on Ferry Road between Sumner and the City. It's all a bit of a haze. I only remember people that I knew filing past, shaking hands with me – people like Mr and Mrs Stace, Mrs Cottrell from Summerhill, and others.

After the funeral and the committal of my mother's body to be cremated, everyone went back for what my family call the “*after-match function*”, which was as usual, a very boozy affair. I don't think that anyone had much to say to me, much less take me aside or talk directly to me. I just remember a terrible feeling of emptiness and being alone in the world.

This feeling was so strong that I left the house and went for a long solitary walk just to be alone with my feelings. I could not stand to be in the house with all the boozing, loud conversation and laughter when I was feeling so destitute and alone.

Once my father died ten years later, all the glue that had united the family was gone and I never had to go through all that again. I began to determine my own life.



My mother's grave in Papanui, Christchurch

I returned to Wellington and to work at the Department of Trade and Industry. I don't think that I ever got much work done; I was trapped in my own private world. However, one colleague and a friend, Arina Mudryj, who was working alongside me, took the time to simply listen to me as I talked about my mother. Unlike others in the family, I did not want to put it all behind me and get on with life. I was not ready for that. I just needed to talk and

talk, and to be listened to. It was an act of great kindness that I have never forgotten.

I remember a visit to my Aunt Sylvia not long after Mum died. She looked at me with that intense look that I remember so well, and said “*Well your mother’s gone now – it’s time for you to grow up now!*” From that time onwards I don’t recall Aunt Sylvia even so much as mentioning my mother’s name even once.

That was my family.

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But she was right in a sense. I did need to grow up and I did. But in the context it was heartless.

On returning to Wellington, I had no choice but just to get on with life without anything really to hold on to, without a real refuge. I must have lived fairly mechanically. I was essentially lonely in my flat in Broadmeadows, and just took the train in every day to work, something that I was neither connected to nor interested in.

I made a connection with the Cambodian colleague at work, Sokha Duong, who I think, was just as lonely and disconnected as I was. He invited me back to his place. He had an ancient old sports car which he used to drive quite fast from the beginning of the newly built motorway, through the tunnel and off the exit onto Glenmore Street.

He had quite a taste, as I did, for beer as well as French baguettes. We used to frequent a pub in the Oaks complex, where a local band played in the style of Django Reinhardt, which I loved at the time., Perhaps it reminded me of my time with my German friends and my time in Germany?

The other thing I did was to immerse myself in German. I went to advanced conversation classes at the Goethe Institute. One person I remember meeting at the time was Alistair, who apart from learning German, spoke Russian with a strong Glasgow accent. He later went on to take over Capital Music and open his own shop, Alistair’s Music on Cuba Street.

Before that, my Cambodian friend Sokha Duong gave up his flat on Nairn Street and came to live with me as a flatmate in Broadmeadows.

Eventually, Sokha and I fell out and another flatmate came to live with me, a Scotsman named Peter. He was a musician who played electric guitar, thankfully without an amplifier. He was also a friend of Maurice Tuckwell, an acupuncturist who was someone I didn't know at the time but met later on. Subsequently, I worked for a while at the Chinese Medicine clinic of Maurice and his wife, Katrina Gascoyne

I started to seek out the company of Russians. That meant meeting with Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union, Jewish refugees.

All of my activity outside of work was somehow connected either to my obsession with "*things Russian*", with language or European culture. Really, I was living as an internal exile.

Among the first that I met were Bella and Leon Nodelman, who hailed from Baku in Azerbaijan. They met my need for Russian conversation and I remember them visiting me in teaching me how to cook rice in the Caucasian fashion. I went on a trip to Napier with them and another very lively friend where I found a very passable balalaika in a secondhand shop, which I bought with their help. Leon went on to have a serious car accident in which his wife, Bella was driving. He was paralyzed and they were divorced. Eventually, he bought a house close to us in Island Bay where he set up a furniture repair business

A significant person over the next couple of years was Elena Shmukler.

I met Elena on a blind date, recommended by Leon and Bella. We may have gone to the movies and had something to drink afterwards. Elena was happy to meet me again and we quite quickly became good friends.

She had arrived as an immigrant in 1979 from Kiev with her parents and younger sister, Svetlana. As a testament to the quality of the Soviet education system, she passed all her subjects in School Certificate, except for English. Quite a bright girl! She went on to university and when I met her was studying for a chemistry major at Victoria University.

During the time we knew each other we did lots of fun things together and through her, I met lots of Russians. It was a time of vodka drinking and lots of music. For a while, I sort of became an honorary member of the Russian Jewish community. which met many of my social needs.

In July 1984, just a few short months after Mum died, Jeremy and his new fiance, June, got married in Dunedin. Lena came down with me to attend the wedding. We flew first to Christchurch and then made the long car journey down to Dunedin with Jeremy and Dad.



Graduation portrait of Elena



On a visit to NZ from Australia years later

I remember nothing about the wedding itself, but I recall seeing the wonderful old buildings of Dunedin for the first time. I met June's mother Florence for the first time and we watched the Los Angeles Olympics on the TV the next morning. It must have been a strange and interesting thing for a Jewish girl from Kiev to be amongst so many Goyim.

Strangely enough, there was a Jewish connection. June's father, Mr Phillips, was Jewish and Jeremy's entire family-in-law was Jewish. Unlike me, Jeremy was very influenced by his in-laws; he always fully embraced the whole Zionist thing. He defended the state of Israel aggressively which could not, in his eyes, do anything wrong. By contrast, I had got a measure of Israel on my visit in 1982. The only shouting match I ever had with Elena was over Israel.

Even though her parents decided not to emigrate to Israel, but to come to New Zealand, she was an ultra-Zionist and remained that way.

Years later, when Lena made a return visit to Wellington with her husband, I recall her look of disgust and comments muttered under her breath, about a group of Arabs who looked much like her, picnicking in a park.

Like all Zionists, she is a terrible racist. I have always made a strong distinction between Zionists, whom I abhor, and Jews, who I have absolutely nothing against and with whom I have several friends.

My "*significant Other*" at the time turned out to be a dog.



My "Significant Other": Sammy

Sammy turned up on the scene while I was in Karori visiting Elena. We both met Sammy on the road. He refused to leave our company and we went searching to try and find out where he came from. Wherever that was he had no desire to return there. He wanted to be with us!

We tried the SPCA who told us if his owners didn't turn up he was mine. There were no takers so Sammy came home with me. I had a full-time job, still 9-to-5 in those days, so he had to spend the day in a kennel. He showed no signs of great emotional stress, perhaps because his Dad came back to him every evening.

Samuel got me out on wonderful walks and outings. I started to discover the delights of walking on Mt Kaukau with him. He became my best and most wonderful companion. While I went on these wonderful Sunday afternoon walks, Elena never chose to accompany me but to stay behind.

During this period, I remember I had just finished reading Hermann Hesse's novel, *Siddhartha*. One morning, I was throwing a "sickie" I went to the local shop and found a book on yoga. Right from the outset, I was hooked and immediately embarked on the search for a yoga class. several weeks later I did an introductory course in yoga with Eric Doornkamp. The rest is history.

Early in 1986, Elena decided that she needed a bigger world than working for the chemical company, ICA, in Wellington and moved to Melbourne in search of a more cosmopolitan world.

It was enough of living in a "village" for her.

For me, that was the best thing that could have happened for me. I quickly found my own way and discovered the world of yoga.

Part Two: Living Consciously



Chapter 9 - Discovering Yoga



It was one of those days when I once again threw a sickie and I went down to the bookshop in Johnsonville where I discovered a book on yoga from the Sivananda Ashram. I devoured the book and was so taken with it that I immediately looked up yoga in the Yellow Pages, and found the Lotus Yoga Centre and made an immediate inquiry about yoga classes. It turned out that there was a yoga course starting in a week or two. Too impatient to wait, I started teaching myself from the book.

The course, taught by Eric Doornekamp, was a revelation. I felt that I had found my niche at last. After doing Eric's course I went on to do classes with Tanya Dyett, which opened up a whole new world of yoga classes for me. After a while, Tanya's classes ceased to give me what I wanted. It was then that I discovered the inspirational Monday classes with Gwendoline Hunt. I became an instant fan. In the year or so that I attended Gwendoline's classes, I don't think I missed a single time.

I had never enjoyed myself so much or been so open to such knowledge and I lapped everything up voraciously. It was a period when I met new people and had new experiences that took my life to a whole new level.

I remember the wonderful visits to the Lotus Yoga Centre in Paraparaumu, the wonderful people that I met there through the WWOOF scheme, and a trip up to a gathering in the central North Island. Wow! It was as if I was discovering the alternative movement, the hippie movement for the first time in my early 30s.

Perhaps the fact that I have not mentioned my work indicates the level to which it played a

role in my life. I tried to be interested but was essentially completely disinterested in that realm. However, it was through work, though, that I was introduced to the next new, important phase in my life. A Sri Lankan colleague at work, Sheila Gunasekera, invited me back home to sample (very salty) Sri Lankan food. She mentioned that she was going to a Buddhist ceremony led by the monks of the monastery in Stokes Valley and asked if I like to come along.

I had studied a little bit of religion at university but knew nothing about Eastern religion, including Buddhism. I accepted the invitation which I seem to remember was Kathina, which is held at the end of the annual rains retreat. It was the first time I had seen Buddhist monks in their brown robes and heard Pali chanting. I was able to sample the delectable Asian food that was given to the monks and then heard the talk given by the senior monk, Ajahn Viradhammo. When I heard what he had to say – and I don't remember exactly what it was - something about the craving, grasping mind – it felt as if I had been waiting my whole life long to hear this message.

Very soon I visited the monastery in Stokes Valley and started to read all I could about Buddhism. I was made very welcome out there and I can remember long talks with Ajahn Thanavaro, an Italian monk who co-established the monastery, Bodhinyanarama, with Ajahn Viradhammo, as he pasted wallpaper in the new meditation hall (called the *sala*).

I started to learn to meditate as I was taught, following the breath - and began to visit the monastery regularly. On my first attendance at the evening puja, I took a seat and leaned against the wall. When Ajahn Viradhammo and the monks came into the room they found that I had taken up their position. Ajahn quipped, "*You'd better shave your head*".

Work was actually reasonably interesting. This coincided with the early Rogernomics reforms as the government tore apart "*Fortress New Zealand*", and any ability of the country to be at all self-sufficient. Working in the Industry Section of Trade and Industry I saw for myself that there was no future for me in this environment and I started making preparations for what was most important for me and prepared for the next stage of my life.

I didn't even try to take leave, but took the rash step of resigning from the Department of Trade and Industry, and the public service.

I never looked back.



In my good days, practising yoga



My first significant yoga teacher and friend. Gwendoline Hunt

Chapter 10 - Travels in Thailand, 1987



The monks in the meditation hall at Wat Pah Nanachat, Thailand

I left in May 1987 for a trip that would take me to Asia for 16 months and would change my life forever.

I arrived in Singapore and made my way slowly up through Malaysia, starting with Malacca and continuing through Kuala Lumpur and Penang before arriving for three months in Thailand. I spent some time on the popular resort island of Koh Samui before doing my first real meditation retreat at Wat Suan Moke. After that, I made my way to Bangkok where I found a meditation centre at Wat Mahathat.

What follows are some of my impressions collected in my diary at the time:

" At the end of June I was in Bangkok and amongst other things I found a central Monastery, Wat Mahathat, to practise meditation in. I found a Dutch monk, Frits, who taught me meditation in the Mahasi Sayadaw tradition and I started to go between my rest house on Khaosan Rd and the monastery every day to meditate.

The meditation, in the Burmese Mahasi Sayadaw tradition, consisted of alternating sitting meditation with slow walking meditation. The one-hour sessions consisted of following the movement of the breath at the abdomen and noting whatever came up, whether it was sensations such as itching (*"itching, itching"*) or thoughts (*"thinking, thinking"*). The emphasis was on *"right effort"*, which really meant intense effort. After the hour there was an hour of intense, and very slow walking meditation noting the intention to remove As well as the movement itself, (*"lifting, lifting"* etc..). And so it went on; there were short breaks

for something to eat once a day, throughout all the waking hours.

After a while, Frits suggested that I had had long enough practising in the city and suggested a retreat at a monastery called Wat Vivek Asom. Apart from myself there did not seem to be any other Europeans and the Thai monks were largely without English, so I was on my own. I quickly came down with a stomach bug and diarrhoea:

"Feeling weak and my left shoulder blade is giving me hell. It seems no one is concerned about me and I feel left in the lurch now... Yesterday was hell! Only went to the toilet about three times – diarrhoea, however, the rest of the day I felt some stomach pains, very weak and faint and later on in the day had a fever and was more or less unconscious. Did not eat anything except for a couple of fruit"

I soon ran into the cultural differences. The Thais, in my perception, had little understanding of western sensitivities and no desire to pander to them. I remember the feeling, as if it was all equanimity and no compassion. I felt that I could've died here and nobody would have cared:

"Conscious of time passing and of feeling pain in the left shoulder blade. Gave way to sorts of giving up, of missing home, Sammy (will he remember me?)... was not able to note thoughts generally feeling rather sorry for myself".

"I really do wonder what I'm doing here; it's easy to keep silence because there's nobody to communicate with anyway!.... The ants are everywhere – probably swimming in my condensed milk by now!

Later on.

"Feel zonked and negative thoughts of why am I here?? Do not want to practise any more today – 8–10, 1–7 today (eight hours). Concentration seemed to be at a low level today and started off with backache, then stomach discomfort (have constipation!! today)., laziness – mind did not seem to wander too much but at the end rebelled. Last sitting, I saw one mosquito and could not sit for one more minute. I went up to my room and ate a banana!"

Phra Frits turned up and I was able to have an interview with him. He said he was quite pleased with my progress and sincerity. He said negativity can be caused by boredom, caused either by lack of effort or by good practice. I said that I was sincerely not sure which was true. It seems that when I appear to be going backwards I am going forwards - it's important to maintain effort!...

"The ants are everywhere today – in all the food and now climbing along the lines across my room so not even the stuff is safe any more! In a moment of anger, I burnt a couple of the buggers!....."

When I do venture out and wander along towards the gate I have been approached twice – what I'm doing, if I am hungry etc. I felt like a prisoner.

Can't I just take a stroll for a few metres? When I go back to Bangkok I will try the floating seafood restaurant! Do something a little naughty!

I found myself, in the midst of all the boredom, constantly planning.

"This is one of the harder periods of my life and I am afraid that my mind is getting away. It is not always easy to control it...but I will not give up. Probably will take a bit longer. I am thinking more in terms of taking off for Europe – just for a few months through the USSR in September and returning to India after Christmas for a yoga ashram."

The more I tried to control my mind the more it got away from me and I started to think of escape.

"I am feeling like giving up more and more. My mind is just not calm and I cannot find any calm. I think that is what I expected from meditation, that was I thought I would find. I would find inner peace in the longer periods of meditation. Instead of that I find a world of suffering, of terrible aches and pains; the room I am living in is infested with ants crawling around everywhere so that nothing in this room is safe,

It is no longer quiet with drilling and hammering going on destroying any peace of mind. It is difficult not to judge all this, to observe the breath and just be aware and not judge. It is incredibly boring and mundane; there is nothing here to occupy the mind with. It is like being in a prison for one week – no entertainment, nothing to read, no one to talk to, just the same four walls– just at one with the suffering, painful mind."

Later on.

"Felt ecstasy and a feeling of joy at being here and being able to meditate!! I think I am really learning to be with myself – that I will never be unhappy again to be in solitude. That is an incredible achievement!"

A couple of hours later

"Have lost some energy and have not felt like meditating with such a lot going on."

I was discovering something about the nature of the mind.

It was the start of the rain's retreat and I had my first opportunity to observe Buddhist culture at work and to make some observations.

"The monks came and assembled on the platform with the Abbot at their head. After some chanting, each of the nuns gave a gift (in name was called out of a hat) to the monks. The monks were I'm able to take directly from a woman who placed a piece of cloth in front of him gift paste en masse and taken by the monk. The woman then bowed to the monk. There's never any sign of respect in the other direction – it's really very sexist! Really, is it a lower form of birth – to be born a female?!"

After 10 days intensive retreat (and even now looking back at the diaries, it seems much longer), I left for Bangkok.

After a few days back in Bangkok and trying to meditate in that environment I left for a side trip to Kanchanaburi, the site of the movie, *"Bridge over the River Kwai"*. This trip stays in my memory because on the first evening there, going to the bathroom I slipped on the wet concrete in the rain and landed on my coccyx. It was very painful! I finally found relief on

my return to Bangkok with a herbal massage.

Soon, I was off again by train to the International Forest monastery, *Wat Pah Nanachat*, near Ubon Ratchathani,. This monastery was in the same tradition as the forest monastery in Stokes Valley in Wellington.

I arrived during the rains retreat, so it was by no means certain that I could stay longer for three days. However I was accepted by the abbot, Ajahn Passano, and my head was shaved.

The routine was very different from Wat Vivek Asom. There was a lot less emphasis on formal meditation practice and much more emphasis on general mindfulness or awareness in routine tasks and chores such as sweeping leaves or fetching water. One of the most memorable aspects of being at Wat Pah Nanachat was just the sheer discomfort of sleeping on bare boards with nothing but a mat, and the sheer discomfort of the meditation hall.

"At 6.30 we were summoned to evening chanting at the "boat", which is a beautifully – constructed new structure with receding lighting, marble floor and wooden panelled ceiling. I had to sit on a cold, hard surface with nothing between me and the floor but my sarong. I felt very uncomfortable – especially during chanting; the pressure on knees and toes was terrible – plus I felt constantly tired and hungry. There was a talk on Vinaya (the monks' Discipline), followed by meditation, chanting, another talk (on the hindrances), meditation. And then more chanting!"

The other constant was sleep deprivation and the long days - 19 hours long. The day started with the bell to get up rang at 3 am, and only finished at 10 pm. Five hours sleep if you were lucky. The day started with a cold shower, just to wake up , and then the morning *puja* with more chanting and an hour's "meditation", which really equated to fighting sleepiness and the struggle just to stay awake, and bearing with discomfort...

While the monks went on their alms round, the lay people had chores such as sweeping out the hall.

The only meal of the day was at about 8 AM. One filled one's bowl with as much as one could possibly eat, because that was all one was going to get for the next 24 hours.

"The meal was a protracted affair. The lay people would offer the food to the monks; the monks then served themselves with the bowls of food being passed from monk to monk and then, finally, to the lay people. There was a long wait, chanting and then the very large meal"

I ended up eating possibly more than I would have eaten with two normal meals.

This was followed by cleaning up, more chores, walking meditation, and a period of short rest, followed by an afternoon of sitting meditation alternating with walking meditation. The major event of the latter part of the day was when the monks and the lay people would gather in the Ajahn's *kuti* for drinks, usually coffee that was so sweet you could practically stand your teaspoon in it. No wonder diabetes is so common among Thai monks!

One of the many things that was hard to bear was the preponderance of things that were forbidden by Thai etiquette such as, at any stage, stretching one's feet out in front of another, or sitting on the windowsill.

It seemed that any attempts to alleviate discomfort were forbidden.

"I actually feel quite depressed and negative. So many things get on my nerves. I am tired of the excess of ritual, including chanting. It seems very strange to me."

I am forever afraid of putting a foot wrong and wondering if I am some sort of 'pariah'. I seem to be always getting critical stares and do not find the monks as helpful and friendly as they could be. It seems that this is not one of the most important qualities."

In short, Buddhism talks about the Middle Way. it seemed there was no 'middle' in it. It was extreme effort, extreme aestheticism and maximum discomfort .

One night, while I was still sleeping in the upstairs above the kitchen one night I woke from a dream:

" I woke in the middle of the night at about 11.30, in a panic. I was sitting meditating (I thought) in the boat, but had no clothes on. What was I to do?! It took a moment or so to realise that I was in bed! Got up and went to the loo. A heavy night's sleep. I did not get up at the bell but slept right through to 6.30."

One of the conceits I encountered amongst the monks was that one could only become "enlightened" if one was ordained as a monk.

"Had an interesting talk with an Israeli monk who is of the opinion that meditation is of little gain to lay people. Unless one reaches the stage of "stream entry" one is still condemned to rebirth. Therefore entering a monastery and giving up one's ego is the only path to Enlightenment."

Obviously, this monk had not given up his ego!

I had plenty of time to indulge in thought and planning. One major theme was whether I would go on to Sri Lanka, or whether I would travel on to Europe etc. I also began to crave sense pleasures and to dream of eating ice cream again! I left the monastery and returned to Bangkok. Naturally enough the ice cream was a let down.

For some reason, I made a return to Wat Vivek Asom, where I stayed for about another week. As usual, in such a situation I was full of conflict and did not have the energy to practise intensively as I had before.

I was confronted by one of the monks with something that has come up several times in my life. That is. to make a firm intention and to follow through with it. After struggling with the mosquitoes, the boredom and the food, I finally made an escape down to the south coast, to the island of Koh Samet.

Back in Bangkok, I bought a ticket to Europe via Colombo and finally, after three months in Thailand, took the Air Lanka flight to Colombo.

Chapter 11 - With Godwin in Sri Lanka

I arrived in Columbo in October 1987 and soon made my way to the Nilambe Meditation Centre, run by an inspiring lay teacher, Godwin Samararatne - something that one encounters just a few times in one's life.



Godwin Samararatne of Nilambe Retreat Centre

I stayed there for almost three months with just a few trips, usually coinciding with extending my visa, something that had to be done every month. This was the most stable time on my whole journey, I learned more in my time at Nilambe than I had with all the intense meditation and asceticism in Thailand.

Indeed, it was a time of unwinding and finding more balance.

What follows are some unedited extracts from my diary:

Nilambe retreat centre

5/10/1987

"I feel a great sense of peace and also greater awareness. The whole day has been spent productively. After morning meditation, a short yoga session and then after breakfast I spent the rest of the morning in my kuti doing both yoga and pranayama exercises, then 40 minutes of meditation outdoors.

"I feel much more balanced with this concerted effort and the feeling that I don't need to hurry. Too often I am ruled by the clock, In meditation I am aware of how much time has elapsed, In yoga wishing to get over as soon as possible and lose myself in distractions.

"....Sometimes I feel inspired by others and sometimes feel overwhelmed and "belittled" by my lack of "spiritual experiences" and meditation. Really, it's the concentration that is not there and which I wish to develop.

It was still about one-pointed concentration of mind and the things I did in Thailand.

14/09/1987

"It is damp and cold and so is my mood. Sun and warmth do such a lot to lighten the soul. When it's wet and all your clothes are musty and your feet are dirty from walking in the mud and the food is insufficient, the mind is negative. Really, it all comes from the mind. It's my reaction to the outside world.

My moods have been very changeable. I have had some good meditations – seated like a Zen master with a perfectly straight spine, and good concentration, walking mindfully and calm. At other times the body is listless and heavy, and the mind craving after food.

A couple of times I've walked down to the bottom of the hill to buy chocolate biscuits to devour them - a craving of the body to compensate for the lack of good food – fruit, bread etc., that I feel I need, especially in this colder weather. Or is it just a distraction, a way out of boredom, just like going to sleep, or reading a book?....

"Yesterday I had a good meditation, then went back to kuti to do some pranayama on my bed. After breakfast, we were talking about the lack of food and how we need more). I decided to walk down to the bottom of the hill to buy some bread – a slow, restful walk in the sun. I bought the usual chocolate and biscuits and devoured them on the way up...

"I need, I think, to accept these weaknesses, just say "OK" to them - just observe the way the mind works.

Old themes kept coming back, such as:

"I get very sentimental about certain things – I miss the comfort of my relationship with Mum, the little nest of 8 Whitewash Head Road. It is a life that has just disappeared and I really do feel alone in the world. I. have tried to reach out to my family, but there's so little to share. I'll never become like them and they'll never understand me."

I had my first experience at Nilambe teaching yoga.

18/10/1987

"Took a group for a yoga class this morning and yesterday morning. Felt quite nervous beforehand, going over the different postures etc., in the meditation before the session. When it came to taking the class I found I was quite calm and able to talk about the exercises, their benefits etc., although I sometimes experience a slight difficulty in expressing myself (the names of postures, and a weak knowledge of anatomy, necessary for teaching of yoga). This morning was less planned but still worked out. The asana part goes quickly – a need to plan out sequences, explanations etc.,

beforehand. But I feel more confident and relaxed than I thought I would and I can do it and feel that I have something to offer, and the fact that some questions have been asked afterwards show it.... Excellent practice for me – taking the class – so it is a possibility when I go back to New Zealand.

“One of the characters that I met who turned up at Nilambe was John from Oklahoma, whom I had met previously during my time at Wat Pah Nanachat in Thailand....”

John, who even back then I found quite intolerable, turned up years later on Facebook and turned out to be a staunch propagator of the official line on covid-19 (someone said in comments, “CIA”). I believe the experiences in Thailand and at Nilambe may have been only excuses to try and change my ideas.

19/10/1987

"John arrived yesterday from Kandy. It was a nice reunion, but the relaxation has gone – too much talk, enthusiasm, starry eyes, dhamma etc. sometimes a little difficult to keep up. By the time I left to go to Kandy, I felt like silence – the need to be with myself, to unwind – I had been on a high the last couple of days.

"John sees changes in the way I am acting, obviously radiating more confidence and calm than in Thailand. It is true that I feel very different here. Wat Pah Nanachat did nothing to enhance my self-esteem. I felt the pressure to conform. It wasn't just doing things I didn't want to but probably it wasn't what I needed at that stage of my development - and hence the conflict. A month at Nanachat felt like a month. Here time simply loses its meaning. I'm much more "in the present moment" than there.

This is a reasonable description of what it felt like to be on a bus in Sri Lanka or India:

"Arrived at the bus stop at about 2.45. I Waited perhaps 15–20 minutes for the bus to arrive. Then a mad rush for the bus and fighting to get aboard – total bedlam. Needless to say, I did not get a seat. Standing, jam-packed like sardines with people pushing and shoving to get in and out of the bus instead of patiently waiting – an airlessness compounded by cigarette smoke, a feeling of being crushed, pushed and shoved, (and being a centre of attention and mirth for school boys).

"We stood in the bus for at least 30 minutes, probably longer before we took off. It was a long bus ride. I managed to get out by sheer luck (or intuition). I thought that the signposts which I half-pie recognised by colour alone and realised that I was at Nilambe - so had to rush to the front to get off the bus! "Quite extraordinary!"

I was starting to crave foods other than the daily hot curries

"I had a good walk up through the wet and rain (a little bit of restraint and eating my small bar of chocolate). Came back for a shower but had to run off to attend to a leech on my foot. By this time I was exhausted, so I consumed my bar of chocolate and then went to evening bhavana."

Godwin's approach to meditation and what I learnt this weekend has been incredible".

This is what I wrote at the time:

"This approach is basically a psychological one based on dealing with what he calls "the monsters" arising, greed, hatred and delusion. He has different and far more relevant words for some of the Buddhist concepts (like the five hindrances) and for coming to terms with one's wounds - both

those inflicted by others as well as feelings of guilt and self-hatred bought out by "wrongdoing" in relationship to others – the failure to forgive ourselves these "misdeeds". So a great deal of emphasis is placed on first developing a healthy ego, of learning to be "friendly to oneself" and to both forgive others, but most importantly, oneself.

"Only then can emit loving kindness to others and confront the "monsters" face on, So he makes much of various aspects of psychotherapy and healing – such as rebirthing, touch therapy, as well as metta meditation"

Meditation techniques

Here is some discussion of Godwin's approach, which was really a middle approach between the traditional Buddhist approach and other ways such as Advaita (non-dualistic) Vedanta that I started to learn about in conversations with one of the other meditators, a German woman named Kristina.

"Godwin talks about the development of "focusing" He does not like the word "concentration" - it implies too much effort"

It should happen in a natural way.

"Listening to sounds develops focus and awareness in a natural way and in a relaxed manner. Godwin emphasises awareness of sights and sounds in Nature – listening to the birds, rain, watching hills, sunsets etc.

"Through this one can come, in a very relaxed way, to anapanasati - the observation of the breath. The right attitude to thoughts, to daydreams and the wandering mind is that it is natural and OK.

"One should not judge oneself for this or feel guilty, No preconceptions should be brought into meditation just come back to the breath, note thoughts, sensations etc."

Godwin introduced a term from Jiddu Krishnamurti, "*choiceless awareness*". or "*bare attention*"!, which he said was true Vipassana (insight).

Godwin had a wonderful exercise.

He got us to tell ourselves, to stop thinking. We all experienced thoughts crowding in. By contrast, when one says, "*Let thoughts come freely*", they don't come and the mind is silent.

"Effort produces resistance. When one says "I must not think thoughts" they come thick and fast! Meditation should be fun, like "playing with the mind". Learning how the mind works is the essence of meditation. Godwin talks of the problems of meditators who take themselves too seriously, and who are unable to laugh at themselves,

Trying too hard often produces tension, and often such people become aloof from other people, "superior", and cold, without compassion. Meditation must be balanced with social action and interaction with people.

Godwin was invariably a kind and attentive teacher. He took time out with me to discuss my diet – how perhaps I should be using more salad so I had fewer gastric problems.

He took me through a rebirthing session and asked me if I thought that perhaps another one would be useful – and perhaps I could stay a little bit longer to get more out of what we get started. He was gently consistent, and never admonished, other than in a very gentle and skilful way.

Looking back at my diary I can see that my mind was settling down and becoming less obsessed with finding the right diet, how I would spend my time and making plans for a trip to India and so forth. I was learning to be In the Here-and-Now

It was very interesting to read these notes from back then. My perceptions have changed little.

Autobiographical notes (from my diary) - 22/10/1987

"I feel like an only child.

"My brother and sister are eight and nine years older, respectively. I was spoilt by my parents and developed a special tender relationship with my mother, who gave, I think, special affection and love because I was a late child and perhaps had greater sensitivity. This has caused some resentment in my brother, who thinks that I was "too spoilt" by Mum, who should have been harder on me.

"I was brought up on a farm, so I was quite isolated. Just a few friends from neighbouring farms, but no brother /sister contemporaries to play with, so developed more individualistic pursuits - fantasy - interesting cowboys and Indians, country and western music (John Hore), writing fan letters to favourite TV stars like Danny Kaye. I was interested in other countries and did projects about them, drawing maps, writing out information, mostly about the USA), and writing stories (which I had "published" by Kathy who typed them at work, at Kodak). I developed a vivid imagination and was interested in helping animals and developing solitary pursuits such as the Dog and Horse Society, imaginary games with Dinky toys and towns built up from books etc., playing "Thunderbirds" in the trees etc."

I then talked about my time at Waihi school.

"I attended a local country school until I was nine when I was sent off to boy's boarding school, I think it was quite traumatic to be separated from family, and I had a difficult time because of a bedwetting problem, which made me an object of teasing and bullying by other boys. I developed a greater sensitivity and kept more to myself and was interested in reading, doing geography projects etc., rather than outside pursuits. I could never play team sports like rugby and cricket, which I always disliked and could not swim until I was about 13 - I am still a weak swimmer. Waihi days, though, we're happy days."

Looking back at this it is interesting how little difference there is between the perceptions here and what I wrote in the first few chapters of this book.

3/11/1987

A murder at Nilambe

"Dr Fernando has been murdered!"

"Early morning meditation and then yoga. Everything seemed as per normal until just before breakfast when a van pulled up almost running me over, and then at breakfast, the terrible story came out."

"First of all, there has been a petrol bomb attack on Pushpa and Chandra. At about midnight, a petrol bomb was thrown through the back window of the cottage. They were sleeping together. Shandra was hit by glass fragments and had burning in her eyes. She saw flames, which she immediately extinguished with a blanket. If she had not done so the whole building would have gone up in flames!"

"Then, at 6 o'clock the next morning, Christina went over to Dr Fernando to get him but found his car round the front of the house with headlights on, the engine running. She thought she saw a body and walked away – "Don't be crazy!" - then finally came across Dr Fernando's dead body in the gutter, his head totally distorted and disfigured."

"It seemed what had happened was that some things had been taken, and there was a struggle inside. There were pools of blood inside the house, It seemed that the struggle had continued outside; his bloody sweater was found outside. What a shock! Nilambe seemed such a peaceful place in comparison with the madness all around, far removed from terrorism and danger - and now!"

"At first I saw myself as being quite removed and disinterested but I really have been shaken by this event. In meditation, I could not get an image of Dr Fernando out of my mind and thoughts connected with the murder. I am pleased in a way that I have not much longer here – only another week."

"Nilambe will never be the same!...."

"All the Sri Lankans here have been down to the bungalow to see the body, plus Ellie and Faith. I do not wish to go and see the bloody corpse – I don't think that not wishing to support myself at that site is running away from anything..."

"Strange that at 4 PM they were still waiting for a doctor to arrive to certify death etc. The body is still lying where it was, untouched...."

16/11/1987

"The police were up, wanting breakfast. Nisanka (the cook), is sick with a fever and kidney pains, and out of action, so everyone is cooking. I slept in the men's kuti and had to get up twice in the night. I felt anxious and scared, hearing sounds in the night. Thank God I'm a sound sleeper."

"The way this country is run is amazing. The police did not chase people away at all. People could come and go and look at the corpse, hang about, and discuss what they thought had happened"

quite openly. They could not get the papers together to get a doctor. They came to take fingerprints about 18 hours later after it had been raining, and tried to read them in the dark. They came with sniffer dogs 18 hours late; they gave them broken glass to sniff to get a trail and found a link with the bungalow.

"Of course! Both Chris and Godwin had gone across.

"Godwin was amazing. It seemed as if nothing had happened. He was still smiling and seemed unaffected. Chris said he behaved just the same as if he was at a garden party at the bungalow with all the investigation etc.. He just appeared to be not involved in what was happening, although obviously shaken. He kept repeating "What a way to die!"

The period I was in Sri Lanka corresponded with a particularly violent phase of the nation's history. Not only was the government fighting the Tamil Tigers in the North, but was then facing an insurrection, later brutally suppressed by the JVP (Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna), a Marxist–Leninist communist party and a violent militant organisation. At the time, because of the violence, the nearby university at Peradeniya was closed.

This drama occurred towards the end of my time at the Nilambe Retreat Centre. In any case, the Centre closed for some time and I didn't see Godwin after this.

In 1999, when I made a return visit to Sri Lanka at the end of my acupuncture, I returned to Nilambe for a visit. I had a fortuitous meeting with Godwin and we reminisced together. By this time he was already ill with kidney disease and he died just some months afterwards.

Writing this, I am reminded of what a pivotal difference Godwin made in my development.

The next phase of my journey was really about furthering what I had learned and applying it under challenging circumstances.



Godwin at Nilambe, 1987



Portrait with Godwin and "John" at Nilambe, 1987

Chapter 12 - India: six months that changed my life

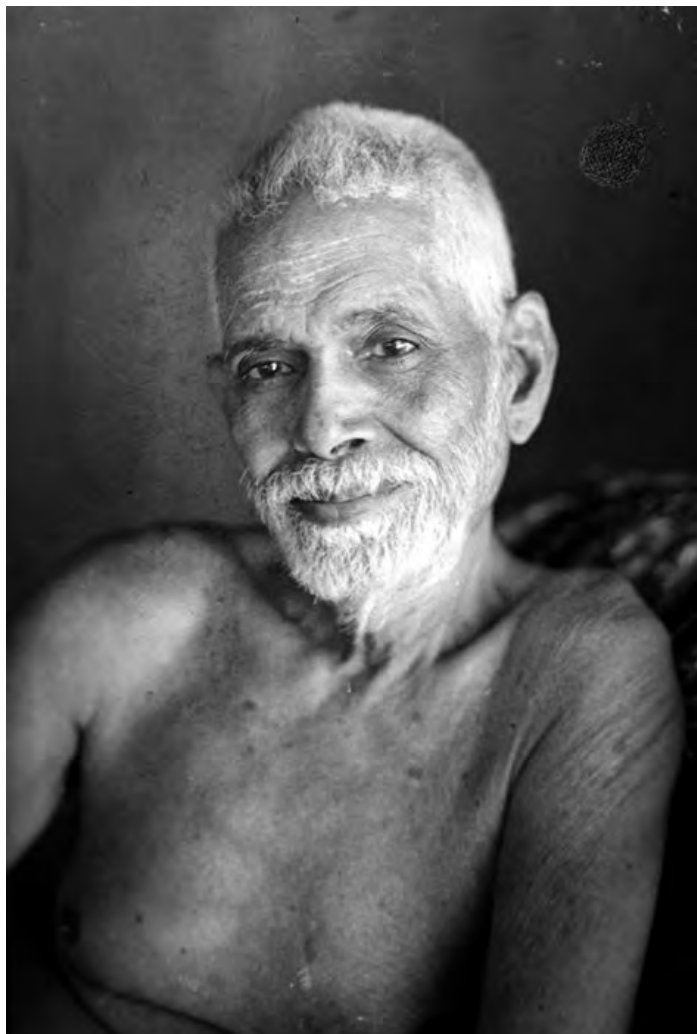


The holy mountain, Arunachal, Tiruvannamalai, 1987. Since this was taken there has been a large reforestation project.

I had learned so much in my 3 months at Nilambe and finally found some balance in my practice after my time in Thailand. It was all grist for the mill and prepared me for the next stage of my journey - 6 months in India.

In December 1987, I arrived in India, at Trivandrum. From there, after a 3 week yoga course at the Sivananda ashram, I started my travels with a visit to the Tamil city of Madurai. Madurai and the Meenakshi Temple were some of the most memorable places I have visited anywhere in the world.

After an exceptionally memorable train journey to Pondicherry, which I have described in detail below, I ended up at the Ramana Ashram in Tiruvannamalai. I met Kristina, from Nilambe, who coincidentally was there at the same time. It was probably the most significant event in all my time in India because of the influence it played, after my time with Godwin in introducing me to non-dualistic approaches.



Sri Ramana Maharshi, the Sage of Arunachala

I later reaped the flower of this in my next trip to India, to Poonja-ji in 1994.

I spent a total of six months in India, half in the south and half in the north. There wasn't a single focus like there was in Sri Lanka, but neither was it just a restless movement from one thing to another either. I have no inclination to go into detail about this stage of my journey, so I will only talk about certain episodes - all, as it happens, in the south.

There is one episode I want to talk about that happened on a train journey between Madurai and Pondicherry.

This is how I describe it in my diary.

"Today is Christmas Day and I am sitting yet again on a train to take off, this time for Pondicherry. I think I am about beyond suffering after having been on the road for 28 hours!"

"After the trouble of booking a ticket on the Pandyan Express on the tourist quota (by going to a counter with a form, then to a ticket counter to buy a ticket, and then to the station superintendent, and then back to the counter. I got up at 5.50 am to catch the 6.45 train to Villupuram. and was at first, surprised that we were ordered to keep the blinds down, disappointed not to be able to see the views. It transpired after a while that the Chief Minister of Tamil Nadu, M.K Ramachandran, also a film star idol, had died in the morning. His death was announced at 3 am, although rumours

were that he had died in the early evening, but this was kept secret to prevent a night of rioting. After two, to two and a half hours of normal travel, we arrived at Trichy. We sat for a while and then the news went around that the Pandyan Express was cancelled. There were queues of people waiting to get their money back, to get tickets etc. People from the train suggested that I find a place to stay in Trichy as it would not be safe to travel on. I was of course the only European except for a couple of Germans(?), who did not speak to me and would not give away any advice and just disappeared off. Terrible! Disgusted!

"I then took off into the streets of Trichy, with large crowds gathering everywhere in great excitement. I tried about four to five different hotels. They were all full. Then someone told me there was a train in about half an hour, and so I boarded the special train from Trichy to Madras. This train even got into the newspapers. I managed to get a seat on the train, which quickly filled up. There were seven people on the seats plus people seated perched on the luggage racks. In short, the train was packed and as we took off, the train filled up some more and at Tanjore masses of excited, 'demented' Indians got aboard, so the whole train was full to the brim, to beyond capacity. There were people on the luggage racks, on the floor, at the doors and almost hanging out of the side of the train.

"I was lucky to find some nice people, some girl students from Delhi, studying in Madras, and on their way home for the holidays, as well as a guy from Pondicherry, all of whom had been on the Pandyan Express

"Everyone else on the train was from the 'people', third-class travellers who could not speak any English and were on their way to Madras, presumably to join the rioting and troublemaking, ensuing from the Chief Minister's death. I had had almost nothing to eat the whole day, except for a couple of idlis and bananas before leaving Madurai, and even less to drink. I was seated in very cramped conditions. The train left Trichy at about 16:00 and did not reach Cuddalore, where I wanted to get off the train, a distance of about 170 km, until about 01:00.

The train stopped at every station and often did not move on for about half an hour to three-quarters of an hour. After a while, the fans in the compartment gave up the ghost. It was, of course, dark, and I waded through the mass of people in the corridor to get off the train 31 km too early at Parangapettai, instead of Cuddalore, so I spent approximately two hours standing with people that I could say were from the "lower castes" who had no English and were extremely excited. I had no room to even move my feet. I felt quite anxious and impatient to get off the train but really resigned myself to my fate.

"Finally, my friend from Pondicherry came to the rescue and we got off at Cuddalore Junction. I ate some bananas and ascertained that there would be no buses. We then made our way to the station and after a while got onto the train to Villupuram and managed to get a perch on the floor, seated on my back and able to nod off to sleep for a while. The trip, which couldn't be more than 30 km, took from 2 am to about 8.30 to 9 am - i.e. six to seven hours

"We spent ages, just stopped in lonely, dark stations on the way. Everyone would crowd out off the train, rushing off to find sugar cane to gnaw at. We finally arrived at Villupuram. There was another interminable delay of approximately one and a half hours before the train to Pondicherry left. We were some of the first to get on the train.

"I was really afraid that either I would get crushed in the rush as the train arrived, or I would get separated from my luggage.

"I managed to get onto the train, almost unscathed. My friend, the computer engineer, having got on first, saved us a seat. We finally arrived in Pondicherry. I feel absolutely exhausted, with a sore throat. I found my way to the Park Guest House dormitory, where after searching in vain for food (everything was closed), and only ate bananas and biscuits. I was accosted by a Tamil from Oroville, who made a most unpleasant impression on me.

"I came back to sleep for about four hours or so. In the evening I walked to the restaurant where I was able to eat samba and chapati with curd. That was all they had. There was no change. The meal was paid for by a pleasant Bengal, from Calcutta, who brought me round to the beach on his motorbike. We spent a while in discussion - I can't remember what. A very pleasant guy. He said that after one and a half years here, he still had no friends here."

I was to spend a total of six months in India.

It was an amazingly intense time with only small periods of formal practice during my time in India. It was mostly a period of trying to develop some equanimity in the face of adversity, especially in my final 3 months in northern India where travel was incredibly challenging and less enjoyable.

I felt well while I was in southern India, but during my three months in the north. I soon began to suffer from digestive problems that strangely never included the notorious *Delhi belly* and began to feel less well.

India was one of those places where one was constantly wanting to leave but once one did one wanted to get on the first plane back. It was truly a love-hate relationship.

I can best describe it in this way.

When I arrived in Kandy, Sri Lanka, the previous year I immediately had touts descend on me, ready to part me from my money, to take me anywhere other than where I wanted to go.

Here, again are some extracts from my diary, interspersed with my reflections.

"After I returned to Sri Lanka, I got off the bus in Kandy and the touts just evaporated. After India, I was not susceptible and the touts came nowhere near me. This was a fruit of formal meditation practice followed by the major life lesson that was India."

I was already on the journey back. I had another month in Sri Lanka. Nilambe had temporarily closed down, so I spent a month in another centre where I remember reading a lot, including books like *Who Dies?* by Stephen Levine, which influenced me greatly.

I decided not to travel on to Europe and let go of my onward ticket and instead bought a ticket to Malaysia instead, where I bought my ticket home. After another month in Thailand, where I did a course in Traditional Thai Massage I returned home.

The following are some reflections from my diary about what I thought I had achieved.

"I know that my time in Asia is coming to an end. It is time to try and see what it is that I have

achieved from being away.

"I am, I think, quite a different person from what I was 16 months ago; more aware and calm than before, and therefore more confident in my abilities, more open and confident in my dealings with people.

"Last year at Wat Pah Nanachat, and elsewhere, my mind was still far more judging of uncomfortable situations. I have learned a lot from my time in Sri Lanka and India. Prior to this, I had been less concentrated and aware of the present moment. The mind had always been restless, off on a tangent, making plans, remembering etc.

"I felt the constant need to put my thoughts to paper, instead of just being, Now I still have high days and low days, but less extreme and I am better able just to remain cool and to be with the present moment.

"I'm ready to return home in two and a half weeks to a completely different life, to, I don't know what.

"There's some excitement. I'm looking forward to the challenge, but also want to make the most of the time I have here in Thailand."

I have always felt that I am taking something. Now, I can give something back. This taking came from a lack of belief in myself, a lack of metta (loving-kindness). I now have a much greater level of self-awareness.



On retreat in Dharamsala, 1987

Chapter 13 - Returning home to New Zealand

By September 1988 I was feeling the draw to return home after 16 months travelling, so I bought a ticket back to New Zealand.

One of the little fears I had as a then-vegetarian was that I would be offered a meal of roast meat. And that is exactly what happened! At the first sit-down meal, I was treated to a meal of roast beef. My less-than-enthusiastic response attracted fury from my sister-in-law, June. From then on it all went downhill quickly.



My brother, Jeremy and sister-in-law, June.

I was subject to angry allegations that I was not doing enough to help, and that because I had spent much of the money I inherited rather than lose it in the 1987 stock market collapse, I was a "bludger".

Strange logic, isn't it?

Finally, it came down to my sister-in-law, June saying it was time to buy them a meal. So, I went out with my brother to buy a pizza and came back to a demented sister-in-law screaming that she wouldn't eat my food, and to leave and not come back until I had changed my ways.

Not eating meat? Meditating?

I took the bus down the island, and got off at Paraparaumu and walked the short distance to the Lotus Yoga Centre where I had my dog, Sammy boarded while I was away. My friend, Gwendoline, used to come out on weekends to rescue him and take him out on outings, and they became the fastest of friends. When I reached the end of the street I found Sammy waiting at the gate and had the most enthusiastic welcome I had had in my whole life.

I then had a difficult time trying to fit back into a very parochial and depressing (post-1987 stock market collapse), New Zealand. I returned to Wellington where I visited old friends. Eventually, I was able to buy a beaten-up old Volkswagen and take myself and Sammy from the Lotus Centre and find board with an old acquaintance, Lalita.

I recall walking to see a friend and being very affected by the emptiness of the footpaths and people travelling around in what I called at the time "tin cans". It was a long way from the vibrancy of Asia. New Zealand was as inward-looking as ever and the atmosphere was dense and the people depressed-looking. It was as if everything I had gained over 16 months of travel dissipated in a whiff of smoke. I fell into depression, something I had not experienced in all those months away despite many adversities. It was something I found very hard to adapt to.

I tried various ways to reintegrate myself, including trying to make a go with the Traditional Thai Massage, which I had learned on a month-long course in Chiang Mai. This was practically impossible because no one had heard of it here back in 1988, although it took off subsequently.

After the vibrancy of Asia life in New Zealand was pretty desolate. There were, however, several bright spots.

First of all, there was my yoga teacher and friend, Gwendoline, who had inspired me so much just 2-3 years earlier. It was always interesting in her company and often a lot of fun.

Gwendoline had a flatmate, Pam, living with her, who had just returned from a trip to study yoga in India. I recall back in 1987 being told by Eric Doornekamp of the Lotus Centre: *"You've got to meet Pam Crisp. You'll like her classes"*.

Pam and I immediately hit it off and I started attending her yoga classes which were a real revelation for me. They were at once challenging and fun and I never missed them.

After several weeks of staying at Lalita's, I was told by my tenants, Slava and his Malaysian girlfriend, that they were moving out. The rent they had been paying while I was away had, in part, subsidised my trip. Now, that money would not be there and I would have to move back to my flat in suburbia. I came back to find that Slava (a violin player) had purloined the better half of my CD classical music collection. They were never ever returned to me.

So I ended up isolated in my sunless house. Just me and my dog.

I recall how I took Pam to the Auckland bus in her beaten-up car that left smoke behind it while she travelled to an environmental conference. Later, the weather turned and I spent a long, dreary Easter weekend stuck in my flat without a car, which was under repair at the time

The weather was so rainy and windy that I could not even get Sammy out for a walk further than down to the end of the street.

The sole bright spot was hearing an interview with ecologist, Teddy Goldsmith from the conference where Pam was, on National Radio.

We had realised that apart from Buddhist meditation and yoga we had another shared interest - a concern for the environment and the dangers of climate change from the Greenhouse Effect which I had first learnt about from an article in the Bangkok Post, which had alarmed me greatly at the time. I recall going to the New Zealand Embassy in Bangkok and perusing the NZ newspapers, only to find there was no reference to my new concern apart from one small article saying that it might affect the ski fields.

Shades of the future.

As well as spending a lot of time with Gwendoline and especially Pam I also spent a lot of time at the Buddhist monastery, Bodhinyanarama.

I felt very alone and isolated and decided I could not possibly stay in my flat so decided to sell it and purchase a property in Stokes Valley next to the monastery. This came right at the time of a post-1987 depressed housing market.

After not so much as a nibble, I finally sold the semi-detached to my neighbour at a very low price and I moved into a house in the bush next door to the monastery.

Sentiment, at the time, was more important than practicality. I soon discovered that this too, was a cold, dark hellhole in winter and all I had was the monastery down the road.

Again, just me and my dog.

There are numerous anecdotes from my early friendship with Pam that stand in my mind.

Recently, we have reminisced together and I would like to draw on that conversation.

"I think what brought us together in the first place was beyond the realm of "what do you do for a job and how much do you earn and what are your goals".

It went deeper than that.

Pam says:

"It was meeting a fellow traveller on the spiritual path, because I met you at a time when that was my primary driver".

"I had a well-paid daytime job but I was on a spiritual journey. You were just back from India and I was strongly on a spiritual path."

"I was very inspired by my own life and not looking for anyone outside of it, to be honest. And you know, having a friendship with a peer, with an equal was special."

"When you were living there in your cottage, I loved going out there on the weekends. There was nothing physical about our relationship. It was just a really good friendship."

"We just had so many areas in common; practising yoga together; going on long walks in the bush, which I loved, going up to the monastery for early morning meditations as well as in the evenings. You were a good cook, you had a good sense of humour. We had a wonderful time."

We recalled a visit to Makara Beach together.

Pam recollects:

"I think we'd been to a movie with Gwendoline and others. The film, "Gorillas in the Mist", had affected us both emotionally. I recalled feeling quite overwrought, so a nighttime visit to the sea was a good way of moving out of that state."

"For some reason, we decided on the spirit of the moment to drive out to Makara Beach. It must have been a very bright moon that night. I remember us walking along the beach and laughing crazily as we looked at this great big moon."

"There was no romance in there at the time, just a meeting of kindred spirits."

As it happens, Makara Beach went on to become a special place for us both. Years later, we moved our two horses there, where they have been for the past 15 years.

Pam recalls the role Sammy played:

"Just going back to Sammy - the very first day I met you, (I've got a very clear memory of us) you were talking in a very animated way about someone called Sammy, and Gwendoline was talking about Sammy too. I remember looking at you and saying, "Is Sammy your son? You said, "No, he's my dog". I think I might have been slightly relieved, actually. Then of course when I met him, I totally fell in love with him!"

Neither of us had any expectations at the time that we were going to have a long-term relationship. Pam was doing her job and her yoga, and I decided I was going into the monastery for a one-year trial as a novice (*anagarika*).

During this period Pam used to take the complicated trip out to Stokes Valley on weekends. I recall us doing yoga sessions together, attending morning and evening

meditation sessions at the monastery and doing long walks together along the tops above the valley where we got quite lost on one occasion.

Despite frequent visits from Pam and much time together in the city, I eventually decided that my future was in the monastery and I decided to enter as a novice ("*anagarika*") on a one-year trial.

I often used to spend the night at Creswick Terrace in the room with Pam who used to put down two mattresses separated by Sammy who acted as a kind of chaperone.

I recall:

"In the period before I went into the monastery I used to come from Stokes Valley and stay with Pam. My dog Sammy always went everywhere with me. When I stayed with Pam we stayed in her room. She had two mattresses that she put down at night with a gap between for Sammy would always be between us, like a chaperone.

"And then it was just before the monastery I came to visit and for some reason, I didn't have Sammy with me - he was absent - so the mattresses came together."

Pam recalls:

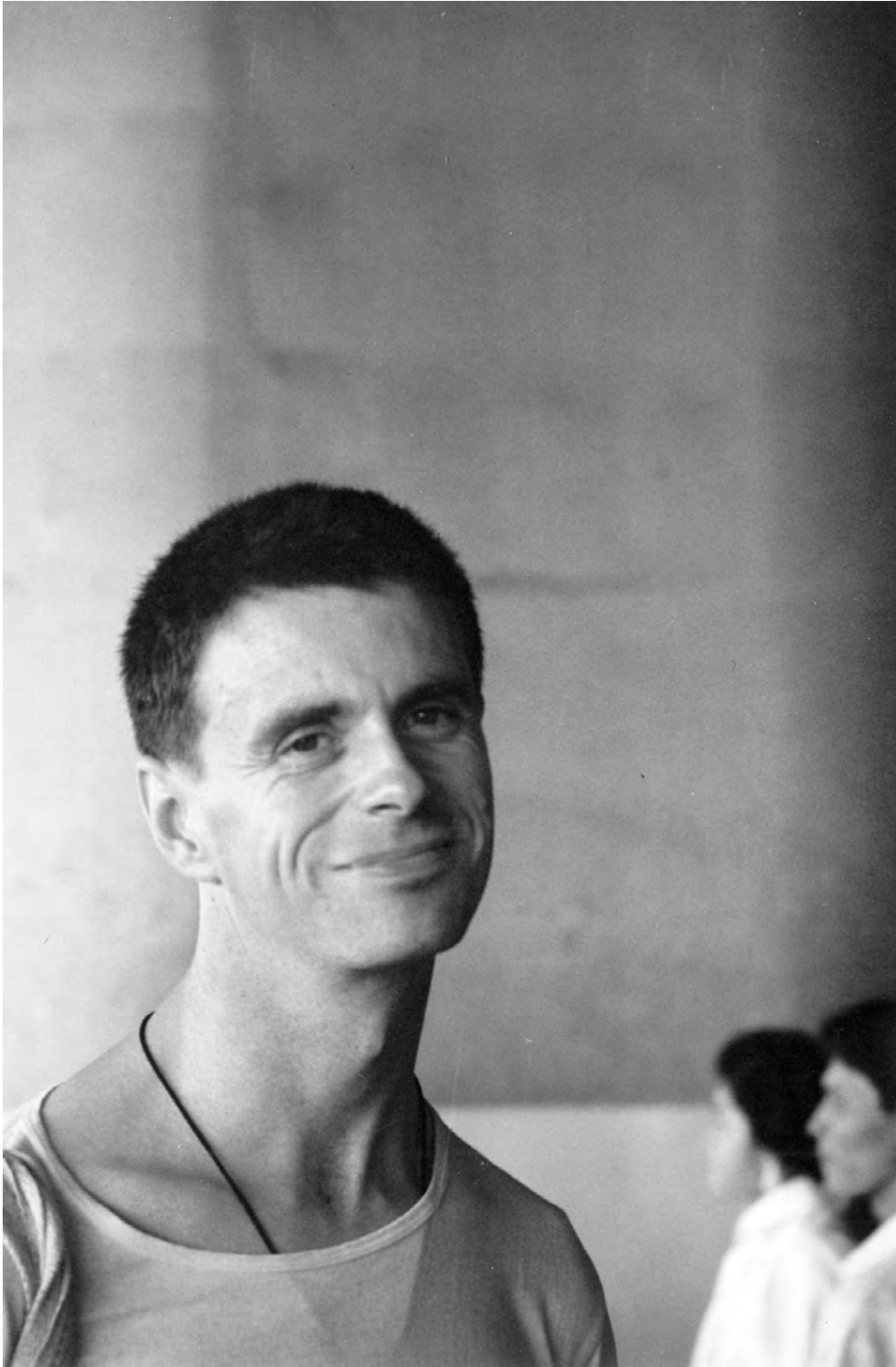
"I remember, you talked about a concern that you had about going into the monastery. I thought it was something about being lonely in there. And I put an arm out. That's all I did. I put an arm out to touch you and then we sort of connected. it was lovely and totally unexpected".

On the eve of entering the monastery as a celibate I discovered that I was in love!

I ignored the strong feelings and went ahead with my plans. I entered the monastery just before the winter "*rains retreat*" and went through the ordination with Pam and another close friend, Heather, in attendance.

But everything's meant to be, and I went through 10 months of mental training and spiritual development, while at the same time wanting to be with my beloved. It is just such experiences that allow us to develop.

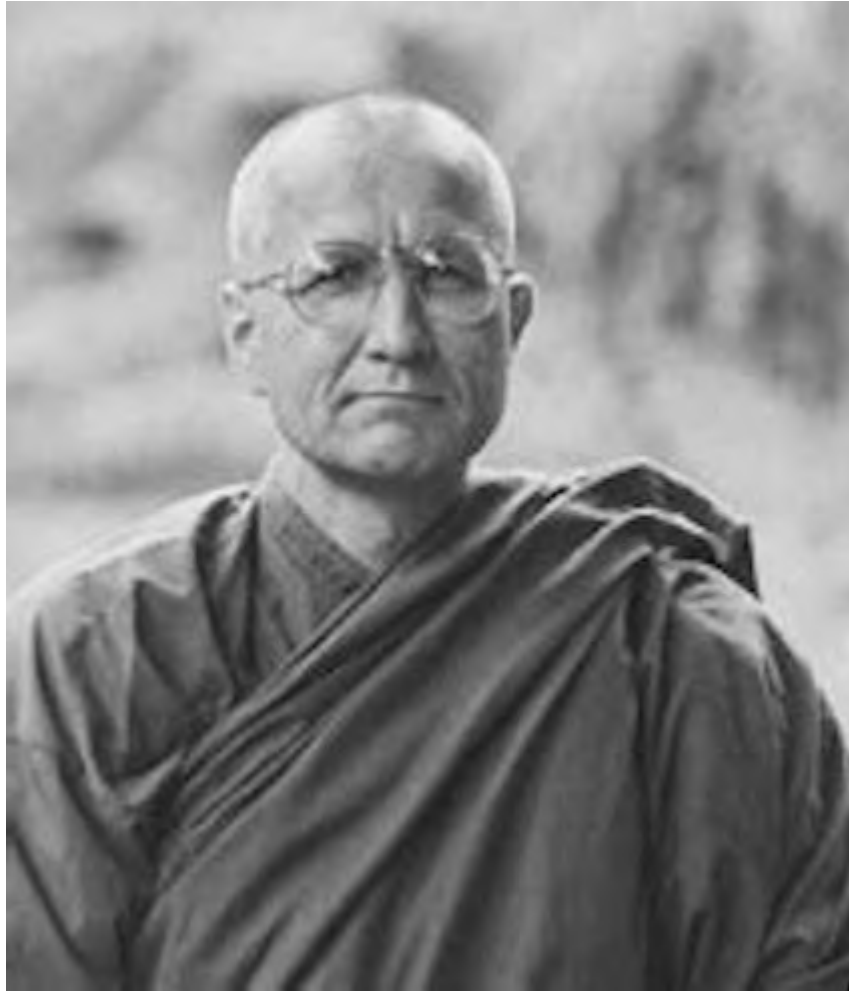
But more of that in another chapter.



Travelling in Asia

Chapter 14 - Bodhinyanarama

I went into the monastery for the start of the 3-month rains retreat, which was the only time when the monastics practised intensive meditation, aside from the morning and evening meetings during the year.



Ajahn Vradhammo, abbot of Bodhinyanarama

Somehow, the regime at the Stokes Valley monastery, although in the same tradition, never seemed as extreme as Wat Pah Nanachat.

There was always chanting which was done in Pali (the language of the Buddha and related to Sanskrit). Later on, they switched to English or part-English, part-Pali. At that time, as with the move from the Latin mass in Catholicism, the whole ritual lost its magic.

During the retreat meditation alternated between sitting and walking meditation, each of 1 hour.

The day started at a slightly more civilised 5 am with chanting and meditation, followed by a simple breakfast. There was meditation through the morning until the only meal of the day, which was late morning, always before midday and brought to the monastery by mostly-Asian supporters. After a rest period, there would be a period of meditation followed by a rest and then evening puja. The day would usually finish by about 10 pm,

except at Full Moon and New Moon, when there would be all-night meditation.

Outside the rains retreat there would be more personal space, with the afternoons being a period of work. In any case, even during the retreat, I had sufficient time for a regular yoga practice.

The meditation periods always lasted 1 hour and combined methods of concentration with *anapansati*, mindfulness of breathing followed by open attention to whatever arose in the mind or body without judgement. The idea was to develop sufficient one-pointed attention to calm the mind enough to practise *vipassana*, mindfulness meditation.

In practice, however, although I experienced periods of great peace of mind and even bliss, the norm was trying to sit through great bodily discomfort, especially, in my case, the knees and shoulders. This provided such a level of distraction that I was often unable to come out the other end. Knee problems are a regular thing for Buddhist monks, as is diabetes.

What drew me to the monastery and Buddhism were the very simple and immediate teachings of Ajahn Chah and Ajahn Sumedho of the Thai forest tradition and I was very fortunate to have as a teacher the abbot, Ajahn Viradhammo.

If I was to put it in simple terms, most of the practice revolved around the principle "*what is of the nature to arise is of the nature to cease*". Monastic life was designed to be sufficiently uncomfortable, without the ability just to follow the constant cravings of the monkey mind to provide resistance. What are called *the defilements tend* to come up strongly: the idea of the practice was to calm the mind sufficiently to allow these things to cease.

Apart from being an Asian tradition, adopted by westerners with their stiff bodies unaccustomed to putting their bodies into such positions for long periods, the idea of sitting this way was to keep the body alert and to prevent sleeping. In actual fact there would be long periods of '*bearing with*' pain in the body; one tended to develop a skill of going to sleep sitting up in meditation posture. How many nodding heads did I see over my time there? The intervals of clarity were far less frequent. Looking back at all this I have to wonder if I had to go through all this to learn that life is suffering (*dukkha*).

Subsequently, I began to doubt if this was truly a road to liberation. What it was, however, was a great training and discipline of the mind, something that I am hugely grateful for. I know if it hadn't been for this I would never have developed in the way that I did, so that when I look back at my earlier life I can hardly recognise myself and it seems as if it happened to someone else.

Similarly, in my personal life, it seems that everything was meant to be. Had I not gone through the terrible periods of self-doubt and suffering I would not be where I am today. Even though I have not been a practising Buddhist for a quarter of a century, everything about who I am today, how I see myself and how I see the world, stems from those experiences.

At the very least, I developed some discipline of mind and the ability not to follow after every whim, as I did in my earlier life. There was a lot of inertia to overcome.

I had to deal with strong longings to be with Pam and to learn to be patient; I never learned to be as patient as I should have been, for I made the decision to leave the monastery 2-3 months ahead of the agreement, and during my stay broke my monastic vows several times. Certainly, it could be construed as a failure. A big thing for Pam, until she overcame it, was guilt that somehow she had 'lured' me away from my monastic training which she regarded as a higher calling.

However, without this failure, I would not have gone on to have a very profound experience in India and would not be who I am today.

My memories are of a golden time in that particular tradition; what has happened since to the monastery has made me quite grateful to have made the decisions I did, no matter how it might have looked back then.

Ajahn Viradhammo was an exceptional and inspiring spiritual teacher, but not one of his successors has ever come anywhere close to him. We were always taught to be not attached to the teacher, but to the *dharma*. Changes in the running of the monastery that were brought in a few years ago seemed to me very like a corruption of the principles it was set up. Buddhist monks with full control of money and resources, without constraint, while keeping the fiction of being '*alms mendicants*' is, in my view, a form of corruption.

I am glad I left.

I was wondering what I might do with my life if I left. I had a phone conversation with Slava (the same one who had earlier purloined my CD collection), in which he said, "*I'm working for Apple Driving School. Why don't you become a driving instructor?*"

I left the monastery at Easter in 1989.

The first thing Pam and I did together was to do a challenging 4-day tramp in the Tararua mountains with Pam and another friend, Rona.

One thing that stands in my mind is that Pam and I set off on a side trip that took us onto the tops. I was a little nervous. I noted every detail on the way up. Meanwhile, Pam was ecstatic and failed to notice where she was going.

Pam tells the story:

"I remember that the first thing I think we did when you came out of the monastery, which was just a marvellous launching of our relationship, we went tramping, with my friend, Rona Spencer, into the Blue Range and the northern Tararuas (a bloody hard trip). We went in for about four days and I remember, towards the end of it, doing that famous move of bending forward and twisting to pick up a backpack, and putting my out. Oh my God, it was so bad. I didn't know how I was going to get

out of there, but I did."

"I was absolutely ecstatic, and I always am when I get up above the bush line. I just find it the most marvellous place, but as you say, you can lose your bearings up there."

I remember another event from the same period.

Pam and I went on a long walk to Butterfly Creek behind Eastbourne. On the way back down, Pam decided to hide behind a tree to surprise me but did not notice that I had walked by. I walked back down on my own but there was no Pam to be seen anywhere, so I had a long wait back down by the car until she reappeared.

I hasten to mention that in such cases I am not calm, but frequently lose it.

However, I was usually calm in major crises. I recall one incident when we were visiting Pam's friend, Marilyn; whose husband, Adrian, had been taken in by scamsters, who were demanding money. I was able to stay calm throughout and resolve the matter as I talked to him on the phone.

It was, in general, not an altogether easy life during that period. Firstly, I had to make some sort of living as a driving instructor which, to put it mildly, was not my vocation. I remember someone telling me, *"You have two jobs - one stress-inducing (driving instruction); the other, stress-reducing (teaching yoga)"*.

The second was our relationship.

While I was smitten with Pam I certainly did not want anything else. But I will freely admit that there might have been an element of insecurity and a fear of being on my own.

For Pam it was different. For a start, coming together for a nice weekend and then returning home and to work was one thing but coming home every day to find me there was quite another. Some of Pam's previous conditioning tended to make her insecure and give her feelings of unworthiness. There were episodes of jealousy because she could not believe in her heart that I loved her and wanted her.

One episode illustrates that.

We travelled up to the Coromandel one summer. We joined a 10-day meditation retreat at Te Moata, led by Ajahn Viradhammo. Pam already harboured feelings of guilt around Ajahn Viradhammo connected with a sense of guilt about *"luring"* me away from the *"spiritual life"*.

Pam explains:

"I remember I felt so guilty about it for a long time, and I finally got over it, but it came up very strongly around the Ajahn, whom I really respected and admired. I remember you and I going on a retreat after you'd left the monastery."

"The retreat brought up all my guilt and feelings that, 'I'm a bad person'. I was on the verge of walking out of the retreat, coming out one day and saying, 'Right, I'm off'. I had the keys to the car.

"Somehow I got through it, with your help. And it was all my projection; there was nothing that the Ajahn was doing to make me feel like that.

"But perhaps I felt that way, partly because I'd spent many years with the Friends of the Western Buddhist Order and was very serious about my study of Buddhism. They, as you know, very clearly delineate their male-female relationships. But they're also corrupted. I saw the male order members, so-called, really taking advantage of these poor women, who became emotionally involved with these men who were totally unavailable. ...

"Ultimately, they could hide behind this bulwark of male monasticism. It was so corrupt, whereas the monks at the monastery weren't like that; they were on a different level altogether".

"I carried a certain amount of moralistic conditioning from that time. So, I had this feeling that I was taking you away from the monastery...."

Later, Pam had another trip back to Pune, India, at the Iyengar Institute, for a yoga course while I went to Australia for a yoga retreat. We both then met in Singapore and travelled up to Thailand and spent a few weeks travelling together. Pam returned home earlier than I did. I stayed on for another month, doing another course in Thai Massage and visiting a Thai forest monastery near the border with Burma.

When I came back my driving instruction job started winding down because I started getting fewer customers. I think Stew at the Apple Driving School realised my heart was no longer in it.

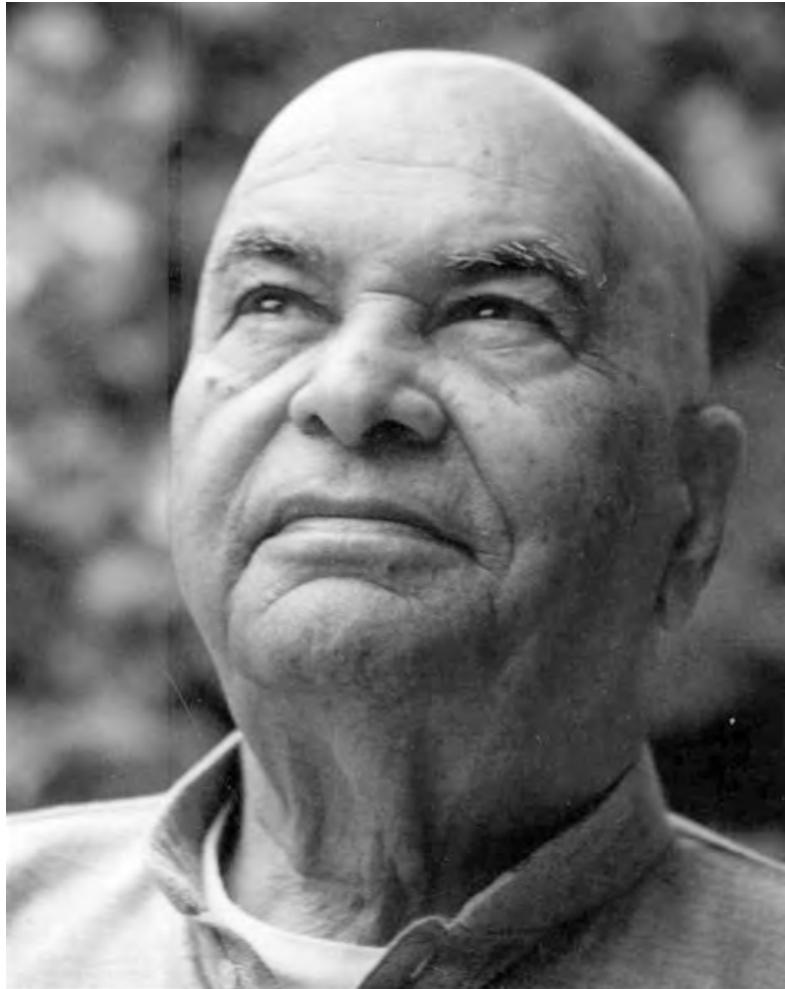
At some point, I did the rains retreat at the monastery and at that time, I learned about Advaita Vedanta. Ajahn Viradhammo was very interested at the time in the teachings of the Advaita teacher, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj and I started to look into this myself. Perhaps the seeds were sown a few years earlier by my visit to the Ramana Ashram in India?

One thing led to another. Pam and I went to a showing of the film, *"Call Off the Search"*, which was about a teacher called Poonjaji, who was a disciple of Ramana Maharshi.

My friend and flatmate, Ron Dubin encouraged me to travel to India, so once again I arranged for my dog to be looked after by Pam, and then by a friend, Maija.

I embarked on a trip to India that eventually changed the lives of both myself and Pam

Chapter 16 - Luck Now - a Trip to India



Poonja-ji of Lucknow

When I flew to India I had no idea what I was going to do next or where to go.

I flew into Delhi in the middle of the night; after the usual problems of getting a taxi to take me to where I wanted to go, I found my way to the hotel Yatri Niwas.

When I went down for breakfast the next day the very first person I met was a follower of Poonja-ji. He was able to explain that Poonja-ji (referred to as Papa-ji), had been in Rishikesh but was on his way back to Lucknow. Once I arrived in Lucknow I needed to take a tuk-tuk to Shalimar Crossing, and there I could find a place to stay and details of satsangs.

On arrival in Lucknow, I was directed to the house of Premnath and Rina. Premnath was a New Zealander, a beekeeper from the Waikato who appeared in the video, *Call off the Search*. I could not have found a more perfect source for all the information I needed to know.

The next morning I went to Satsang, not far away. I recall waiting for Papa-ji to arrive; we would all file into the hall. There would be a period of silence and then Papa-ji would read out letters and answer them. Sometimes, he would invite people up to sit with him while he answered their questions.

His teachings were actually quite few. His was an invitation to call off the search, to stop thinking just for a single moment. I don't know how long I was attending satsang but I ended up writing him a letter describing what was happening. He confirmed my experience and gave me a spiritual name, Vishram, that he said translated as "*eternal rest after a long journey*".

From then I fell into what Pam described as a 'Well of Silence'.

While writing this, I found an old letter to Pam that I wrote from Lucknow. This was my description:

The mind has been quiet, free of worry and suffering, mostly free of thought.

What strikes me most is the simplicity of it all. All the years spent doing, always Buddhist meditation practices. Actually, I think the only reason to do them is for the sake of doing it, like yoga. Really, there is no change from before."

I described my first satsang with Papaji:

"This morning, I went to my first Satsang with Papa-ji. I can't really say that much, but I experienced great peace, laughter and anxiety, as I wrote him a letter explaining my practice and asking how I move beyond.

"My letter was the last for the day.

"My heart was fluttering as I saw him. I sat in front of him, feeling very small, and rather in awe.

"His answer was very direct and matter-of-fact, otherwise I can't remember much except that he said to direct inquiry to the Experiencer rather than to the experience".

And from a letter written a few weeks later:

"I love you, but all this is coming and going within an unchanging background of Emptiness. When one stays still in the mind then there is the realisation of who one really is. This is very powerful. There is infinite space for the entire world to arise and cease.

My memories had faded a bit but I found a letter in which I described the moment I had a profound realisation:

"I really feel, what I came here to do is completed,

"I wrote a letter to Papaji, expressing how I had been experiencing the absence of thought and could see the space from where thoughts arose. I was called to the front where he sat.

I had forgotten, but while reading these newly-rediscovered letters remembered that at that satsang with Papa-ji, I had followed a Buddhist tradition, offering him a tray with a flower, incense and a candle. I said I did not really have any questions but would like to bow.

"I also received a spiritual name, Vishram, which he said means "Eternal Rest after a Long Journey. He said that I'd been travelling for 35 million years, but the journey had come to an end.

I concluded by urging Pam to come to Lucknow.

"I am convinced that you should come here. You have the understanding, I believe you also have many accumulated merits. Those who come here with a sincere desire to be free, seem to find what they are looking for, although Papaji can be quite hard on some people who are just playing or fooling themselves."

I have had all sorts of dramas in the last 30 years that would seem to have taken me away from this. But all that is just the activity of the conditioned mind. I have found that I can return to this insight at any time, at any moment.

The notable thing about Poonja-ji, who by then was 84 years old, was that in satsang he was like the "*Lion of Lucknow*" but when you saw him in an everyday setting he just looked like a vulnerable old man. I have experienced that before in spiritual teachers, that when they are teaching some strength is manifested that is not there in everyday life.

His responses to people varied greatly according to what he was seeing in them. In some cases, he acknowledged and affirmed their experiences: in other cases, he was more philosophical; in others, he just told people to go and sit in Nature.

That to me explains many of the contradictions one sees in Scripture, whether Buddhist or Christian. I can imagine how the things people were told were collected into one Canon.

I could go about my admittedly unstressful business, have conversations and still behind all of that still feel that "*Well of Silence*".

After a few weeks of attending satsang, I decided to do a 6-day return trek to Pindari Glacier in the Indian Himalaya. I did the whole thing on my own, repulsing the aggressive efforts of a local to carry my luggage and instead doing what we do in New Zealand - carry our own pack.

I met an awful Swiss couple, who were loud and judgemental. I decided to walk by myself in silence and thereby saw many wondrous things such as lemur monkeys in the jungle. This eluded my Swiss friends because they were constantly chatting, mostly complaining about things like the increase in the price of tea.

They were also engaged in some fairly underhand dealing with their Indian porter, which involved him getting them some ganja in return for the promise of a pair of running shoes at the end of the trek.

I recall that on one occasion the kitchen where the porters always slept, was overfull and

he had nowhere to sleep. In true European colonial style, the Swiss couple refused to help. After it became clear he was not going to sleep a wink between two chairs, I helped as best I could by topping-and-tailing with him on the bed.

I can no longer remember the details, but they betrayed him by not keeping their end of the agreement and he did not get his running shoes.

This had a good outcome for me, as I travelled back on the bus with him. Thanks to my small kindness he took me back to his village, where he introduced me to his family, something I took as a huge compliment and privilege.

Months later, back in New Zealand, I received a letter from him.

After returning to Lucknow, I made the long trip down by train to Madras, which has since been renamed Chennai. It was a very wet season and there was a lot of flooding. I travelled from Madras to Tiruvannamalai, home to the Ramana Ashram. The ashram accommodation was overfilled, so I found a room outside the ashram to rent.

Living outside the ashram, I met some interesting people. One significant person I recall was a Finnish woman, Kirsty, who was living in a mud hut as a *sanyasi*. She took me to see some of the disciples of Sri Ramana Maharshi who were still alive at the time including "Verandah Swami" who, true to his name, lived on a verandah and gave silent *darshan*. In hindsight perhaps, this was because he had dementia?

I travelled back to Madras and booked into the famous Broadlands Hotel, an amazing, rambling old hotel in an old part of the city called Triplicane, where I had stayed on my first trip. It was. I recall telling an elderly porter that I had been at the Ramana Ashram, only for him to do a deep bow and tell me I was holy.

Only in India!

I took the train out to the airport to meet Pam off the plane from Singapore, which arrived in the middle of the night.

I remember us walking through the water to cross the road and eating in the Maharajah restaurant round the corner with the South Indian food, which we loved.

After a couple of nights at Broadlands and exploring some of Madras, we took the bus back to Tiruvannamalai, where we stayed in the room I had rented. Everything close to the coast on the way there was in flood, but not Tiruvannamalai, which was inland.

This was a real revelation! I had never enjoyed myself so much or been so open to such knowledge and I lapped everything up voraciously. It was a period when I met new people and had new experiences that took my life to a whole new level.

When Pam and I visited the ashram for the first time, Pam had an emotional reaction and was physically sick under a tree on the ashram grounds. All the locals were very

concerned and one lady, a doctor, gave Pam a course of antibiotics which she didn't end up taking. Both of us believe this was of an emotional, or, perhaps a spiritual nature, with Pam feeling overwhelmed, for she recovered very quickly.



Crossing the main road in Triplicane, Madras

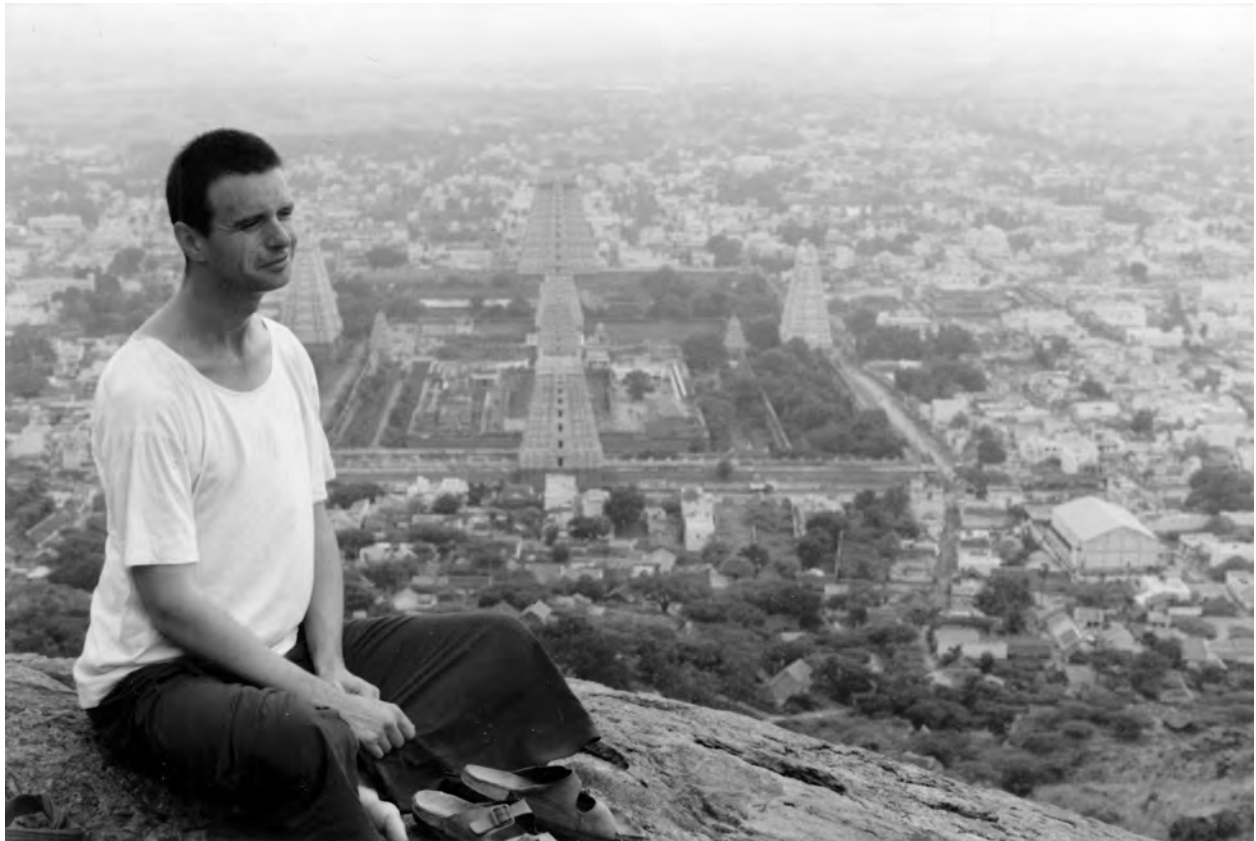
Says Pam:

"In hindsight, I really wonder whether I wasn't facing some karma of my own. A lot changed me as a result of this time in India."

I remember us walking on the mountain, Arunachala, where we found the Virupaksha Cave where I had meditated on my first visit in 1987. That was one of the caves where Sri Ramana Maharshi had lived and meditated, almost a century before. I recall stories that said that people who entered the cave had one of two possible reactions: either they could not get out quickly enough (it was admittedly very hot there); or they felt great calm, if not bliss, and did not want to leave.

I was in the latter category.

The other thing we both recall is our experience circumambulating Arunachala, which is a tradition for pilgrims. I would like to focus a little on Pam's experiences.



Sitting on Arunachala above the town of Tiruvannamalai

"I had some experiences that I can't explain as anything except Grace, or being in the presence of a Consciousness that was beyond the physical body that I inhabit.

"I remember walking on the mountainside on one occasion (It happened once before).and experiencing an overwhelming scent of roses. There were no roses. But it was something that I've since read about in the Yoga Sutras; It's an acknowledged phenomenon".... It felt like a connection with a divine presence"

Pam associated this with Sai Baba:

"I kind of linked in my mind to Sai Baba for some reasonAt the time we were staying there. I was immersed and reading Sai Baba. For all his faults, he obviously also had tremendous power of some sort. I experienced it several times while I was in Tiruvannamalai.

"Also, when I was in Pune at the end of 1989, I got very ill with giardia for several weeks of my time there. I ended up pretty much having to do a retreat in my lovely little room at the Catholic, Christa Prema Seva Ashram, where the nuns would bring me rice and yoghurt and bananas every day.

"Over that time, I became deeply immersed in a book about the British Christian sanyasi, Swami Abhishiktananda.

"A lot changed for me as a result of this time in India. I was deeply inspired by him and I was also aware that the ashram where I was staying with some of the other yoga students at the Iyengar

Institute had been a very significant place for people on spiritual pilgrimages to stop over.

Interestingly, Swami Abhshiktananda mentioned a meeting with Poonja-ji;

"Multiple contacts with prominent saints such as Sri Ramana Maharshi, Sri Gnanananda Giri and Sri H.W.L. Poonja, led him to profound advaitic experience as well as to final recognition of the truth of advaita during the last years of his life."

Pam continues:

"When I went back to Tiruvannamalai with you, I think it happened again; I sort of dipped back into what I had experienced in Pune. It was such a deep quietness, at Arunachala. It was amazing"

She goes on:

"(These experiences were) very profound and made it possible for me to have a long-term, satisfying and meaningful relationship with you, because I could never have before."

We then returned to Madras where we explored the Kapaleeshwarar Temple, the Theosophical Society and the Krishnamurti Foundation. We also visited Mr Desikachar at the Krishnamacharya Yoga Mandiram. He said: "So, you've been to Arunachala?!" and bowed to us.

In Lucknow, we found accommodation at the same house I had stayed in just before leaving for Madras with my friend Ron. One of the people we met with and liked was a Jamaican Englishman, Tony Moon. After we returned to New Zealand we received a letter from him. Years later, when we saw videos on the internet with Mooji, we realised he was our Tony. He had become famous as one of the major teachers in the Ramana - Poonja-ji lineage.

We used to have a rest after lunch in our room (I remember how cold it was). One day Pam asked me to take her through Self-inquiry.

This part is Pam's to tell.

"You just kept asking me the question, "Who am I? Who am I?" I remember at a certain point, saying, laughing, "Oh my God, it's God". I was not separate."

I remember that we did not have lunch at satsang, but usually went to an upstairs Indian restaurant in a nearby marketplace. We both remember a sweet shop, and a shop that had big sacks of grains and sold spices.

Pam recalls standing outside in the marketplace with her bike, when:

"Everything fell away. I fell into this deep well of silence - I couldn't say bliss, it was... everything just stopped I felt so, so graced to have that experience and I knew when I went back to the ashram the next day that something really major had changed, and I thought that even the attitudes of some of the other people towards me."

One satsang, Pam sent Papa-ji a letter asking, *"How can I do my work in the world and abide in the Self?"* His response was something along the lines of, *"Do your work but keep a secret lover"*

Towards the end of our stay, Pam stayed in Lucknow with Premnath and Rina, and continued attending satsang while I took a side trip, a pilgrimage to Sravasti, a Buddhist holy place. Sravasti (or, *Sāvasthī*) in Pali), was home to the Jeta Grove where the Buddha gave most of his sermons. It was a special experience dwelling in Silence and being in the very place where the Buddha had delivered his sermons 2500 years ago

I have to say a word about the "scene" around Poonja-ji. While Papa-ji was the real deal we had a different feeling about some of the community. There was certainly the feeling of a Praetorian guard around Papaji. Many of the people came from Pune Osho ashram so it felt like a lot of hippies, having lost Osho about 3 years earlier, had come to Lucknow for their next experience.

We returned home through Singapore where we stayed with the in-laws of Pam's brother, John.

Whilst in Lucknow I had witnessed several things that could be described as small miracles. We experienced our "small miracle" in Singapore that felt more like Grace than "coincidence "

"We were at the airport. We were lining up to go through to the departure lounge. For some reason, an official approached us and took us out of the queue and told us to follow him. We were taken out of the queue and escorted into the departure lounge. We didn't have to wait in the queue.

"This was just one of those simple little things that were quite magic that just seemed to happen"

Indeed.

We both had experiences that have changed our lives. A lot of the conditioning Pam had from her earlier life just fell away. It has stayed that way. We have been able to live a pretty harmonious life together in the last, almost 30 years. Life certainly has had its challenges and hasn't always had that magic feel we experienced in Lucknow, but neither of us has ever contemplated walking out on the other.

On our arrival home we were met at the airport by Maija and Sammy.

Sammy was the happiest dog when he was living with Pam and Gwendoline in the first period I was away, but he must have missed us terribly; he seemed depressed and withdrawn; but I came to recognise that he was just old.

A couple of months after we returned, on a walk, he weaved onto the road in front of an oncoming car. Sadly, he would not accompany us into the next stage of our lives.



Pam at the Corbett National Park, 1993



Robin at the Corbett National Park, 1993

Chapter 16 - Living in a new home and the Death of My Father



This was the last picture of me with my Dad in 1989

It became clear that Sammy was declining. A couple of months after arriving home we started looking for a house to buy, and serendipitously Pam found a home in Island Bay being advertised for private sale by one of her yoga students. She was accompanied on her first inspection by Sammy.

The very next day, Sammy accompanied me on a walk. At a certain moment, he must have weaved onto the road because of roadworks and was hit by an oncoming car. The driver didn't even bother to stop, but the next person to come along was a neighbour, who took the dying Sammy and me to the vet, where my companion of almost ten years was put to sleep. He spent the whole day at home until Pam was able to get out, and we had one of the monks from the monastery do some chanting. It seemed to us that he was waiting for Pam because it was only when she arrived that his body finally became stiff - before that he appeared to us to be asleep.

The next couple of years have left me with very little to remember, apart from the reality of having very little income. After having a friend help with some repairs, I put my Stokes Valley house on the market. In the interim, our friend Maija rented it from me. Finally, it sold, again at a loss, but I was able to put that money into our new house, which allowed us to pay off Pam's mortgage and to live from then on without debt.

It was at that time that I met Patrick. We had something in common - he had been a Cistercian novice monk, while I had been a Buddhist novice for a short period. We struck up a friendship that has lasted for almost 30 years.



My friend of 30 years, Patrick McHugo

In our early years of living in Island Bay, I managed to occupy myself and have a small income by teaching yoga at different venues. Around that time, Pam and I set up a small yoga business in central Wellington, 'Yoga on the Terrace', that survived for a couple of years thanks to cheaper rents in a building marked for redevelopment.

My father resided in a nursing home in Christchurch, where he received excellent care. I visited him whenever I travelled to Christchurch, but one year I received a call informing me that he had contracted pneumonia. I rushed down to bid him farewell, as it seemed likely that he wouldn't recover. However, the medication proved effective, and he rallied, living for another year before passing away the following winter.

During our visit to the South Island that summer, I took Pam to the rest home to meet my father for the first time. To our surprise, we discovered that he had been "gardening" and had uprooted all the plants. In response to Pam, my father took her hand and gazed at her intently for a prolonged period. Although we were told there was no awareness, we had a sense that he was offering his blessing.

I have very few memories of his funeral, except for the eulogy given by his friend and my godfather, Peter Keddell, who shared some remarkable stories about my father that I have recounted elsewhere.

Reflecting on his life, I regret how little I understood my father, the challenges he had faced in his life and the significant sacrifices he had made to make life financially easier for his children.

Ross was a kind man who had experienced considerable trauma, including being unloved by his mother, going through the Great Depression, and spending four years at war. He was always kind unless provoked. In that regard, we shared a similar trait. Unfortunately, he struggled to express his emotions and wasn't always easy to get along with, which led to misunderstandings.

It is tragic that due to some mismanagement, including being persuaded to dissolve the family estate, a significant portion of what my father had worked so hard for was lost. Additionally, a considerable amount of money was spent on his care. I had also frittered away some money to help Natasha and her family leave the Soviet Union. As a result, only a small fraction of his hard-earned wealth remained

However, there was sufficient money for me to undertake a four-year course in Traditional Chinese Medicine. This time I was more responsible and worked hard to get my diploma.

I invested my money with a funds manager and watched while the funds I had invested decreased in value, even in better days. When I confronted Mr Still with this he showed me a graph designed to prove that whatever the ups and downs, the stock market always recovers. What a load of baloney! By the time the 2008 financial meltdown came around there was very little left, and what remained has been invested in a way that is still safe to this day.

Unlike most of my family, I have no head for business or increasing my nest egg. However, my 'irresponsibility' has allowed me to put money that has come my way into things that have taken my life forward in some way, albeit not in any conventional sense. For one, it allowed me to get into a health practice that, sadly, was cut short by a major collapse in my health.

But, I am getting ahead of myself. The next stage will be described in the next chapter.



Robin and Patrick relaxing

Part Three:

Our Family and Other Animals



Chapter 17 - Raja, the Ginger Terror



Shortly after we came back from India, Pam sold her property in Paekakariki and she bought a property in Island Bay and we moved in together.

The people we bought the house from were moving to Australia and they asked us if we would look after their two cats for a month. Merlin and Bonny were a delight to look after. At the end of that period, a friend, Felicity, gave us an advertisement for a litter of kittens that had been put into her mailbox, and we went for a look.

I chose the ginger one who seemed a bit more outgoing who we named Raja.

Indeed, he was rather imperial, if not imperious.

Some of the things I remember was that he would climb up a tree, then call out to be rescued. I would get the ladder out and bring him down and he'd immediately climb right up again!

Pam says:

"I never wanted a cat. As a very committed conservationist working for the Department of Conservation I was fully aware of the impact of cats on our native wildlife. Nevertheless, I fell in love with this tiny ginger bundle. Of course we went to look, and we both fell in love with the ginger

terror"

"Raja was a fierce little thing and probably we probably contributed to this by roughing him up from a very early age , we contributed to his fairness by sort of roughing him up. I remember Robin, in particular holding him and boxing with him"

As a kitten, he would fetch bits of paper I would throw for him like a puppy and I would wrestle with him. Possibly because of my excessive intimacy with him, he became excessively familiar.

"Raja was a real hunter I would say, but unfortunately this kind of wildness extended into grabbing onto a limb with both front claws extended years claws paws with clothes on the end. Several friends were kind of ambushed by Raja who, without warning, would latch onto people's legs.

"On one occasion, Clare, a gentle, quiet yoga friend was sitting with Raja on her lap and noticed that immediately her attention moved away from him to a conversation. Raja became quite agitated and was just about to do the famous rap, but Clare was too quick for him and put him down. But he would latch onto people, including us, but, fortunately, not very often".

But, Raja was also very loving

Pam recalls the first time he caught a rat.

"We were in bed. We saw a rat in the living room. We placed Raja right in front of it, but he didn't seem to know what to do. We left him to it and before too long, he had dispatched the rat. For years, Pam would talk to Raja and say, *"He caught a rat"*. We were so proud of him.

We soon realised that we really needed a cat because our property was a regenerating coastal forest with a lot of trees, quite a few birds and a lot of rodents. Raja didn't take birds very often, if at all. Raja had a habit of bringing his quarry into the house to show us, but we don't remember him ever bringing in any dead birds in to show us.

Skinks, however, were a different matter. Over the time we were there. I would say that, sadly, Raja exterminated the entire copper skink population on our little hillside. Pam recalls going to work one day and feeling a lump in her shoe under her sock. Much to her horror when she took off her shoe she found a desiccated skink under her sock that she must have had stood on.

We had various episodes with Raja.

"The worst episode we had was when I went down to my family home, Mum's home and Hokitika in the South Island to visit Mum for about a week and Robin called me a day or so later to tell me that Raja had gone missing. We were both terribly worried. After receiving that phone call - it was probably that night - I had a very vivid dream, of this little ginger cat, right down near the road level. He'd been hit by a car and thrown back against the concrete steps but he was still alive.

"A couple of days later Robin rang me in Hokitika again to say that Raja had turned up and had somehow made his way up to the front porch".

We took him to our wonderful vet, Michael Lyons. It turned out that he had a serious fracture of his pelvis that required him to be kept as still as possible for well over a month, so he spent about three weeks in the veterinary hospital. The people there loved him because he was so friendly, lovely and cheeky.

He slowly improved and we eventually brought him home, but we had to keep him in a large wire cage for another month.

Pam recalls:

"I remember one day Robin and I just looking at each other, and saying "we can't do this any longer. We're going to let him go. If he goes, that's it. We're not going to keep him trapped in this cage anymore". So we let him go and he never looked back. I don't think it was a very slow recovery after that initial period of confinement. He was soon climbing trees again."

The whole section, which was quite wild, and beyond, was the kingdom of both Raja and Mishka.

I remember climbing up through the trees and undergrowth on one occasion, looking for Mishka and found both of them there, in their kingdom. It was a wild stretch of undeveloped hillside extending over several properties to another street altogether together. For both Raja and Mishka it was their kingdom. We had no idea whatsoever how far Raja wandered.

Ritual was an important part of life with our animal friends.

I remember every night when I went to bed Raja would sit on the bedclothes and pull them up, so Raja would be sitting right over me. There was a morning ritual too. Pam would pick Raja up and put him over one shoulder and then the other side. This would be repeated three times and then she'd give him a gentle hug. Pam said he was definitely a baby substitute. Sometimes the blighter would wake us up in the early morning with a very sort of delicate touch of a paw and sometimes he would gently place a claw up Pam's nostril.

Raja and Mishka had a special relationship that was both a friendship and a rivalry. I was at home after we brought Mishka home and watched the young Raja hounding the new arrival until he had him bailed up in the cupboard. That set the tone for the relationship. After that, they co-operated,

I was in the living room at Island Bay once, waiting For Pam to come home. Raja got up when he heard her coming up the path and went to Mishka and told him, "*Get up. She's coming*" and they both then went to the front door and waited as Pam came up the path. It was Raja that picked up her imminent arrival.

We stayed 12 years in our Island Bay home and then moved to our house in Alicetown, Lower Hutt, where we have lived for the past 16 years.

By that time we had moved, Raja was getting less active, and older - he was probably

about 12. We left him in the vet hospital while we moved house and got settled in. Our Island Bay neighbour and grandmother to Mishka, Jean Keightley, gave Pam an elasticised collar to take him for a walk around the section.

"It seemed a bit ridiculous and I thought he wouldn't tolerate it. But he did".

When we brought Raja home after we'd been here for the best part of a week he was absolutely delighted. He went into the bedroom and there was his familiar double bed and he got underneath it as he always used to do at Island Bay, and started pulling himself along the wooden slats, purring madly. He wanted to be with us, that's for sure.

When Mishka died, Raja lost his friend and competitor and went into decline.

Mishka died, and before we got Patch, our section became a target for the neighbourhood cats. Raja was here and he couldn't do a thing about them.

Before too long, though, we got our next dog, Patch, After Mishka died and we got Patch, our golden border collie-labrador cross. That was really good for Raja. It gave him a lift.

But, it was not all plain sailing. I remember taking Patch for a walk past a neighbouring section where she spied the dogs on the other side. She pushed on the gate, which opened and before I knew it both dogs, which looked quite ferocious, were out on the street feeling very pleased with themselves. I thought, *"What the hell am I going to do now?"* I couldn't get them back in, so I brought them home, which I thought was the right and only thing to do.

Raja disappeared for a whole week. Pam called and put notes in letter boxes but heard nothing. Then after about a week, he turned up and I took him through to Pam who was talking to her mother on the phone, and deposited him on her knee. He was hardly the worst for wear and had a few cobwebs on him. He'd obviously been under the house. We had no idea what he had eaten or drunk for a week under the house. But that is the mysterious nature of cats.

When Patch, with her intense border Collie ways, turned up, Pam was worried she might kill Raja. But it never happened and the two of them developed their own relationship and often shared the sofa. I remember one occasion, Patch wanting a dog biscuit from the pantry. Patch didn't have the dexterity to open the door herself but Raja was able to do it for her by wrapping his claws around the cupboard door.

Finally, Raja at the age of 13, went into decline and died of cancer.

Now, I'll describe our wonderful Mishka, the Charmer.





Raja in death, 2007

Chapter 18 - Mishka, the Charmer



Mishka came to us after losing Sammy and moving into our new home in Island Bay. Having a cat and leading busy lives we were not looking out for another dog.

Pam had a dream about being on the beach with a white dog and that the white dog was almost just a speck in the distance. " It was galloping away in front of me."

Some weeks after that we were cycling around the bays and came to Moa Point where the dog pound is. Pam had the bright suggestion, "*why don't we just stop and just have a look?*"

That was fatal because we discovered this charming young white dog looking beseechingly at us. We were smitten and I went back the next day with my new friend, Patrick to have another look. I asked if I could take him for a short walk to which the folk at the pound agreed. We took Mishka to a rocky area across the road. Mishka was delighted, so much so that he peed on my foot.

So, we brought Mishka home. There were two conditions: one, that he be neutered; the second that we have a secure enclosure for him.

I remember taking Mishka to the SPCA for his operation. He must have had an inkling and wanted no part of it because as soon as I let him out of the car, he started walking quite

purposefully in the opposite direction.

I used my rather limited building skills to build an enclosure and invited the man from the pound to do an inspection and give the okay.

I recall two other incidents.

I recall how Pam would come home and couldn't find her shoes and found them on the back section, up the hill.

At this stage, we'd leave Mishka in his enclosure when we went out. One day, our neighbour said to Pam, "*you realise that he goes out and puts himself back before you come home, don't you?*"

The other memory is coming home to find a note from the postman saying that our dog had latched onto him and had followed him on his rounds. He must have had other adventures on the way for we later heard he had visited the butcher shop and may have scored a sausage.

What I remember is his charm. He had a most peculiar "smile". He had the habit, which I believe is common in Dalmatians, of pulling his lips back and exposed all his gums and do this amazing toothy grin where you could see both sets of teeth and gums.

I have to say we decided he was some sort of cross between an English bull terrier and a Dalmatian. The bull terrier in him was clear to see but he had a refinement not in bull terriers. Perhaps, because of his "smile" we decided he was Dalmatian although he didn't have any spots.

Pam remembered how for some weeks Mishka was silent and never barked. However, one night when she was on her own Mishka gave out this deep bark that made Pam almost jump out of her skin.

Mishka must have protected us because while several of our neighbours were burgled we weren't touched. I remember hearing Mishka bark ferociously and then seeing someone slope off down the path away from our house with a large bag over his shoulders.

He must have taken a very rare dislike to the furtive teenage son of our neighbour's, Mike and Priscilla for I once saw him barking quite ferociously.

Mishka must have looked quite ferocious. I remember in my travels a carload of young men admiring Mishka and asking "*do you fight him?*"

Fight?

Mishka never looked like harming anybody and usually charmed everyone except the most extreme dog hater. In fact, we were concerned for his safety as there was a lot of theft of dogs around the country. They often ended up being used for fighting or as bait for fighting

dogs. We stopped tying him up outside supermarkets or when we couldn't see him. He might have been hot property to someone with ill intent.

Mishka was a shocking shedder, there was white dog fur. Pam swore that she would never again have a white dog who shedded.

Our next dog was white (albeit with spots) and was a shedder.

We learnt unambiguously that Mishka would not live in a wash house or anywhere outside. He soon began to inhabit one of the armchairs which he soon outgrew. I don't think we ever invited him. He invited himself anyway. For a long time that chair was full of his body oil.

We both remember, once, he was about to jump onto the more comfortable sofa. When he noticed us looking at him he pretended he wasn't doing it by removing one foot and then the other and flashing one of his characteristic grin of embarrassment. From then, a common refrain from Pam was "guilty, guilty, guilty!"

When I started my acupuncture studies we started giving some thought to what we'd do with him during the day when we were both away. We met a woman, Diane, from down the road who had two incompatible dogs called Toby and Asia. Diane's place was a common destination for Mishka and we often got the unwelcome phone call, would we come down and get him.

We were referred to Jean, an elderly woman who lived nearby. She not only agreed immediately but said casually that Mishka had been visiting her regularly already, something that involved crossing a fairly busy road.

Jean ended up taking Mishka on. He used to spend many days with Jean. She was like a grandmother to him. When he arrived he usually went off for a tour of inspection before ending up lying in front of Jean's heater or following the sun.

Mishka was an almost daily visitor to Jean for almost 10 years so her house was a second home for him.

Mishka was a smelly blighter, really. Often, he would come home very pleased with himself having rolled in some smelly duck poo. Apart from that he had quite a strong male odour. We remember Jean complaining. "That dog smells, you know". When Pam tried remonstrating with her the response came back, *"You know the rules. Well, he can only come back here if he's had a bath"*

So it was a bath for Mishka, an unsettling experience for him as I had to lift up the nearly 40 kg dog and put him in the bath for a good lathering.

He'd turn up at Jean's the next day, welcomed, as if nothing had happened.

Mishka almost always came with us on holiday.

He accompanied us on most of our annual trips to the South Island to spend time with Pam's mother in Hokitika. On the rare occasions he didn't come with us, our friend Patrick would house sit and look after the animals.

He's had a very special relationship with Patrick, whom we've known for almost 30 years now, and he used to come visit us and he would always sit on the porch. Mishka would spend a lot of time with him and I remember, Patrick was going through a bit of a hard time. And Mishka would come and just be on his lap. I remember Patrick describing Mishka as "my male nurse".

On one occasion we had him in Hokitika and we went for the customary early morning walk along the beach, right down to the very wild mouth of the river, which is notorious for the shipwrecks in the early days and many drownings. Anyway, Mishka did what he always did and disappeared. In a heartstopping moment we spied him way out on the bar with just the white head showing above the surf. We were sure we had lost him. but, lo and behold, he rode in on the surf and got out of the water, shook himself and looked very pleased with himself.

On another occasion, we went for a walk around the town with him. Shortly after, he was being followed by a whole retinue of dogs who seemed to treat him like a hero as if he was the big dude from the capital. They then, the whole pack appeared on the lawn of Pam's mother,

Mishka was an escape artist, like Harry Houdini. Shortly before we left our Island Bay home I saw him sitting down the bottom of the path next to the border with the neighbours. Mishka had his usual disarming, beatific look. I knew what would come next but couldn't help myself. I turned around to go up to the house and when I looked back he had gone..

By the time we moved to Alicetown the fatty lumps he had had for some time had become very large.. Unfortunately, it was cancer and Mishka went into rapid decline. He was only with us for a couple of months after the move and was so sick that all the local cats swarmed around and harassed the already-old Raja.

I remember Mishka's last day. We have a photo of him on the lawn with Pam. We went out to the farm to visit the horses and took him with us. By the time we got back his legs had collapsed and he couldn't walk. We got him into the dining room on a mat and we put mattresses on the floor and slept with him for the night.

The next day we called his vet, Michael Lyons, out and he euthanized Mishka. He was surrounded by friends and even had Buddhist chanting by the same Buddhist monk, who happened to be there, who had chanted for Sammy 12 years

Our old cat, Raja, couldn't really cope with seeing his old friend and rival dead. He literally crawled around the walls to avoid him. He became very depressed and went into decline and died not too long after Mishka.

Mishka had been a large part of my life and in that moment I was torn apart. I remember going to the front of the house and just wailing.

One more amazing thing that happened very shortly after Mishka passed was that a few days after his passing, on pulling into the driveway both Pam and I had an apparition of him coming round the corner. This happened to us both independently and at the same time. There is to me something mysterious and ineffable in our relationships with our animal companions. After Mishka died we were fully involved in our lives and especially, with the horses. Again, we had no thought of getting another dog but not five months later Patch walked into our lives.





Mishka did not long survive the move from Wellington to Alicetown

Chapter 19 - The Horses



At some stage, Pam and I began to contemplate doing a horse trek in Mongolia. We gave up on that idea so we decided to do a high country trek in the South Island instead. We started going out to the Country Club, a trekking centre outside Wellington which, since covid, and with the death of its founder, Roy, has closed its doors, to prepare.

The high country trek, although it was only 3 days, was the trip of a lifetime and both of us were hooked.

When we mentioned the wonderful large horses we rode (a Clydesdale - thoroughbred combination), the folk at the Country Club mentioned they had the two perfect horses for us - Tarzan and Hercules. Hercules, as a part-Clydesdale, was a giant of a horse and Tarzan was a magnificent, solidly- built station-bred horse.

To say that neither of them were beginners' horses would be an understatement. We went out on several experienced rides led by a woman called Chris, Pam riding Tarzan and me on Hercules. They were exhilarating rides.

I recall going out on several consecutive frosty, Saturday mornings. 2004 was in fact the last year we had regular frosts. Every winter since then has been mostly frost-free with either multiple floods or normally warm temperatures.

I was so taken by my new pastime that I decided to lease Tarzan. I recall a response like, " *Are you sure*" but in my enthusiasm threw caution to the wind and took him on. I soon learned that Tarzan, as was told to me by Chris, trusted the herd more than he did me. Attempts to take him out on his own were to no avail. Taking him up the main road he called out to the herd the whole way.

Another time riding him out he spied the herd and when I tried to urge him forward he bucked me off. This repeated once again. Various ways were tried, including putting him into a stock saddle. It was decided that Tarzan was too much for me and I was offered a standardbred horse called Biscuit. Compared to Tarzan and Hercules, Biscuit at the time seemed a rather boring horse. He was certainly quite biddable and I was able to take him out on his own. This was his most endearing quality. In fact, he seemed to quite like it.

But, I shall return to Biscuit shortly.

When Tarzan bucked someone else off it became evident he had no future and was headed for the knacker yard. At about the same time, we both remember him, being shut up in a loose box, hearing him call out, not to the herd, but to us.

What followed was the most amazing example of communication with an animal that I have experienced. I was driving up the drive to the top of the property when I encountered the mob. They all got out of the way except for Tarzan who planted himself in front of my vehicle and would not move. I got out and received a message that translated into the thought form "*Please save me. Please get me out of here*". Once I had the message Tarzan moved out of the way.

There was not a doubt in my mind that this was a direct transmission. After talking to Pam we rang my cousin, Rod and his wife, Sarah, suggesting that we could act as shadow buyers if they could take him on. The response was, "We'll get back to you".

Five minutes later, we received a phone call. The answer was "Yes!".

So, we paid for Tarzan and arranged to have him trucked down to Rod and Sarah in Blenheim. It was an amazing story. Materialist atheists would poo-poo the whole idea of communication with an animal but I have had sufficient similar experiences to not the slightest doubt.

We only need to listen with our whole Being, but who is receptive or patient enough to do that?

The first things that we discovered about Tarzan was that he was a lot older than we had been led to believe and that his teeth were in bad shape and, more significantly in relation to his bucking, he had a chronically sore back.

No wonder, therefore, apart from being a wild boy, he bucked.

He was treated with kid gloves to see if he could be brought back. I recall travelling down

when Rod and Sarah brought in an ex-rodeo rider, who seemed ultra-cautious, to try him out.

After fixing his back and a lot of work with him he became quite rideable - never, of course for the general trekkers!

Pam and I had numerous visits to Blenheim and Tarzan never ever forgot me and he always gave the most enthusiastic welcome a horse is capable of - actually so subtle it might be missed by most.

We are both so happy that Tarzan had a sympathetic human and horse family and was able to live out his final years in contentment and happiness.

Back at the Country Club, I took on Biscuit. I was able to take him out and he was at his happiest when I came for him and led him down from the top paddock to the stalls (HIS stall!).

Eventually, I bought him.

The first great experience was to join a 2-day cross-country trek on a station near Palmerston North. The wonderful thing was that over 2 days we gained confidence in each other and Biscuit gained confidence in himself and his capacities.

At the same stage I was approached by a family at the Country Club: would Pam like to lease their Welsh Cob, Belle? At first, Belle did not have sufficient confidence in Pam and her riding skills and found skilful ways of refusing. However, with time and some riding lessons this changed and Pam and Belle gained confidence in each other. We both had some superb rides out together on Biscuit and Belle.

In hindsight, we can say Belle was a great teacher and was able to instil some confidence in Pam, even when she ran her down a fairly steep hill that was called the Rollercoaster!

At one stage, after a change of farrier, I noticed that Biscuit was slow and stepped up short, especially at the end of the shoeing cycle. I started doing some research on the internet and learned of the evils of shoeing.

Eventually, I discovered the Strasser method and traced down a trimmer, John Easter. John was finishing his training in Germany and agreed to trim Biscuit's feet and help transition him to barefoot. When I told the farrier, who I believe was responsible for Biscuit's lameness, what I intended to do, the response was red-necked hostility. I had never encountered such narrow-minded hostility as with the horse fraternity, whose attitude was the only way was to follow the old ways simply for the reason it has always been done that way, even if it harmed the horse



Belle came into our lives for a bit

Biscuit had very contracted heels as well as a coffin bone that would have given him problems, so the Strasser method was better able to correct these problems. However, the New Zealand countryside is a lot rougher than Germany and this presented some problems that had to be seen through. One solution was to put him in hoof boots (with socks!). This attracted a lot of negative attention. It's similar to natural medicine whereby a person has to go through a process of healing which may make them feel worse temporarily although it takes them to Wellness. For normal, narrow-minded people any discomfort a horse would feel would be proof of failure. Far better, in their mind, to continue shoeing and exacerbate the problem until the endpoint is that the horse is put down because of untreatable lameness. How many shod horses live through their natural life? Healthy horses can expect to live into their 30's, but that is rare.

The atmosphere at the Country Club became so toxic for me that I decided to move Biscuit to a pretty rough farm out at Wainuiomata. Biscuit didn't object to the rather uncouth behaviour of Jo and Graham who best be described as hillbillies. Rather, it allowed him to develop as a horse and his confidence increased in leaps and bounds. For the first time, he was the lead horse who was admired and looked up to for the first time in his life.

One major change to our lives was when Pam decided to get a horse of her own. Rod and Sarah had two sisters, standardbreds to look at, Poppy and Squirt. When they met there was no doubt in Pam's mind. Poppy, who was notoriously hard to catch, (we weren't told about that), immediately gravitated towards Pam, attracted by her straw hat.

So, the deal was done and Poppy was trucked up to Wellington and out to Wainuiomata. I can say it was love at first sight between Biscuit and Poppy. The two became inseparable.

In 2007 I had a two-month stint overseas. When I got back Biscuit was slightly out-of-hand. But more than that, our relationship with Jo on the farm in Wainuiomata had deteriorated so much that we decided to move the horses.

I approached John, who had only just purchased his farm at Makara Beach. He immediately agreed to have the horses (who he already knew well) and so brought both horses over. Neither of us will ever forget the amazing male dance between Biscuit and Draachen over Poppy. Biscuit and Draachen became close friends, a "second lieutenant" to "Captain" Draachen.

Sadly, John lost his three horses, the main tragedy being the loss of nuggety.... in his prime. Many horses have come and gone. Biscuit has become the farm's most long-term resident. He has been there for 15 years.

Unfortunately, later on, Poppy had a tragic end when after a wonderful competitive trail ride Poppy got caught up badly in the shonky fence wire of Graham and injured her badly. Later on, he wrote to Pam, demanding money for his damaged fence. Things were very bad but became even worse after the vet called out and advised us to "*fill her with bute*" and truck her home. Later, Julia demonstrated to me her incompetence when she clearly had no concept of what she was looking at. We followed her advice and trucked her home with Pam being with her in the float. Something snapped on the way back home and it became clear that she was finding it hard to stand on her feet, so we stopped, managed to get her out and put her in a small paddock where we were able to keep her until with a friend, Rebecca's help we were able to get Poppy onto a float and drive her home. I recall to this day the effort of getting her out of the float.

We persevered for some weeks over that summer paying a lot of money for someone to do *bioptron light therapy*, something that was never going to work. Eventually, it was a distraught friend and horse masseuse, Leanne that took one look at Poppy and saw the hopelessness of the situation.

Pam decided to have Poppy euthanized by the same incompetent vet. When the time came Julia insisted that Biscuit be taken away so I put him in a stall. At the moment of the injection, he got himself out of the stall and he ran over to say goodbye to his beloved. It was hugely moving to see the bounds of friendship between two horses that even transcended death. One time we found a sad-looking Biscuit just standing motionless under what we called the Poppy tree.

For an indeterminate length of time, Biscuit had no partner, neither did he seek one. Eventually, through a friend at work Pam was offered a mare, Lucy who, unlike Biscuit, had run races but was retired. I think it was a case of either Pam taking her or she might be put down.

I was the one who travelled over to float Lucy back to the farm and so was able to witness the first meeting between her and Biscuit. I had to lead her through a paddock where the herd was. Lucy kicked out at all the other horses but there was this amazing dance between the two horses while they became familiar with each other and then walked away together, literally into the sunset.

At some stage, I discovered natural horsemanship and in particular the Parelli method. I started doing the 7 games with Biscuit and went on a couple of workshops. I learned even more when I discovered the American horse trainer, Mark Rashid and did a couple of workshops with the Australian, Stephen Halfpenny. Through this I learned about "following the try", only using the smallest amount of pressure needed and immediately removing the pressure the instant the horse made a try.

But my best teacher in this was not a human but Biscuit himself. I recall taking Biscuit to a horse trainer. I had got him to the stage where Biscuit would turn on his hindquarters. He did this beautifully, but all it took was for the trainer to get Biscuit, who was distraught at being separated from his mare, to get him to turn on his hindquarters repetitively as a kind of "punishment" for his lack of attention.

What that meant was that Biscuit refused point blank, to do this movement. We were back to stage one. Until one day, I was sitting on him and I just gave him a tiny touch on the hindquarters and he turned on his hindquarters. Biscuit had taught ME.

By working in this way I was able to demonstrate moves that he did not know he was capable of and he was able to develop a dexterity destroyed by his training as a pacing racehorse that only allowed one movement - forward. Biscuit took delight in his new skills and would practise them eagerly - especially going backwards!

Both Biscuit and Lucy, through natural horsemanship, learned manners, such as being sent through an open gate which none of the other horses on the land has

This is often a matter of safety.

Biscuit and I had many adventures together over several years. The delight was always the many occasions we went out together- just the two of us. Biscuit always enjoyed this. He has always enjoyed being the special one with his human.

We did several seasons of competitive trail riding and Biscuit won several ribbons in the beginner's class.

We were both at the top of our game but then there was an accident that brought all this to a screaming halt. (See chapter 20)



Riding a not-too-happy Tarzan at the Country Club



Sultan (aka. Tarzan) was very happy in his new home



With Biscuit and Poppy on the beach



Fired up and ready to go: Biscuit in the Kaimanawas, 2011



Upright and confident. Biscuit on a natural horsemanship workshop





On my last competitive ride on Biscuit before my accident - Waitohu, 2011

Chapter 20 - Patch, the Enthusiast



After Mishka died neither of us had any intention to get another dog. We still had our cat, Raja and horses. Pam recollects:

"I remember looking at the couch after Mishka and Patch had both died and breathing a sigh of relief and thinking "Ah so lovely to have the couch back. And I'm not going to be cleaning up lots of white dog hair" and there was a feeling of actually wanting a space of being quite sort of relieved not to have to look after a dog."

However, Patch just appeared in our lives. On my visits to Jo and Graham, I often used to stop by their house for a cup of tea before going riding. On this morning, I picked up a copy of *Trade and Exchange*. I was perusing it lazily and this advertisement just stared out at me. It was an advertisement for a border collie cross in Marton, up-country from Wellington.

I was drawn to ring the woman, Jackie that evening. We had a long conversation. It turned out that Patch had been found on the property of some young men who had her tied up to a clothes line. Jackie rescued her and brought her back home to a whole pack of other border collies. Patch was very needy and did not get on with the other dogs. Jackie realised that Patch would be better off in a one-dog household.

We agreed we would drive up to meet her. Pam demurred and we drove up to see her. We agreed to take her. On the way back, we called in to visit some friends. Pam takes up

"I found Patch incredibly demanding. I thought, "Oh my goodness. What have we done?" She was unsettled and challenging would be an understatement."

While we had dinner Patch scratched at the door and cried.

Pam, at least had doubts, But then, she thought, *"Well hang on. She's just left her home.; she's been uprooted again; she's gone to yet a new home and we just need to persevere"*

The first weeks were pretty challenging. As Pam puts it, *"the country girl comes to town"*.

Pam found her very wound-up on walks and I recall sitting on my chair. Patch was so needy that she literally tried crawling up my front in an effort to get to my face for a lick.

On a visit down to Hokitika to see her mother, Pam and Milo went out for the evening and came back to find that Patch had destroyed the curtains.

This was a dog with separation anxiety!

Eventually, Patch settled in and so too did the anxiety and hyperactivity

Pam recollects that Patch took over the couch so now it's pretty wrecked - at least the bit that wasn't damaged by Raja. But, neither of us is that house proud. We just covered it up the couch with old blankets and things and it remains that way to this day.

Pam goes oh, *"Our friends loved Patch. She was such a sweetheart really, once she sort of settled and got through that trauma that she'd obviously come in with. She was really humorous. She was just a wonderful sort of humour. She made me laugh and was hugely enthusiastic"*

Another endearing trait was her water fetish.

Whenever we used the water hose Patch would become very excited, and would bark and sort of fight the water. On a favourite walk through the bush to a place called Minnow House, there is a small dam. Patch didn't like deep water but she would jump in and excitedly bark and sort of gulp and drink the water while paddling up and down frantically.

Eventually, we began to trust Patch to go out with us on rides with the horses. We got a sense of how she would be in that sort of environment and were able to stop leaving her in the back of the car.

She was really good on the farm and we trusted her around stock, which we could never have done with Mishka. Patch seemed to have a natural affinity with rural life.

That was the working dog in her.

We used to go out on longish rides over the hills onto the adjoining properties. Patch would disappear into the distance, often on the scent of a rabbit, but she'd always come back.

I remember cutting some cattle with Biscuit. Both Biscuit and Patch instinctively knew what to do. Patch would goad the cattle and excitedly run away from them. This continued until, in her old age, she could no longer outrun them and she became wary of them.

Patch had a strong hunting instinct. While we were still at the farm at Wainuiomata Patch took out a couple of laying hens and again on the Makara farm she again took out one of the valued hens of Carol, one of our fellow grazers. Carol was less than impressed and Pam had to reimburse her to the tune of \$25 or so. Patch was just doing what dogs do. However, when we got laying hens of our own she knew that they were HER hens and left them alone. We are sure she would have protected them from other dogs.

Pam's friend, Eve, who had two dogs of her own and worked nearby used to take Patch out on long walks and describes how Patch would catch possums, dispatch them quickly and efficiently disembowel them. Eve described onlookers looking on with fascination.

Sometimes Eve would sit on the hill and she'd be waiting for over an hour for the dogs to come back. She could hear them in the thickets after rabbits but she just had to wait for them because they would only come when they were ready.

Pam recalls, " I've often heard that it's really good for dogs to have wild food and I don't know whether Patch usually ate her quarry, like ate quite a bit of the rabbits and the ducks are at the farm that she took out, but I'd like to think that she might have got something for her efforts".

On one occasion, Eve took her dog, Jip for a walk in the bush in the hills between Eastbourne and Wainuiomata and Jip went missing. It turned out she was attacked by a wild boar. Jip ran away down the hill and ended up being run over on the Wainuiomata Hill Road. Eve "borrowed" Patch for the night in a vain attempt to find Jip.

Pam sums up;

"Patch was a great sort of companion. Underneath that hyper sort of hunter part of who she was largely determined by what had happened to her in her younger years there was a really intelligent, wonderful dog.

She really was probably a lot more capable and we were able to allow her to express."

The following story shows how Patch was in her senior years.

"I met a woman on the beach on the riverbank once. She said *"I don't sort of always have to plan the walk. I let her take me for a walk"*. She was talking about her old dog.

I started doing that with Patch in the last couple of years of her life and it was amazing. I

think the first time I did it, we went down to the river and she had sort of looked at me as if to say "*which way are we going?*" and I just stood and I said "*Patch, which way?*" She headed north along the river and I followed. We kept going and I thought "*gosh, how far are you going to take me?*" Eventually, we came to a place on the riverbank, where she sniffed around. Eventually, it became obvious that she wanted to cross the road so I put her on the lead and we crossed the road and we ended up going where she wanted. She stopped leading at that point because she had got me where she wanted. She was happy. We climbed up over the Normandale bridge, a good sort of hill walk, and up into the bush where Patch and I often used to walk to a beautiful place that was one of our favourite walks, where the dam is where she used to have so much fun in the water.

There were certain things we would always do on that walk. We'd come off the little bridge where she used to stop and have a play in the water and then normally, not long after, it became quite a steep, downhill climb. And I'd hunt out for old pine cones, which I would throw and Patch would just go tearing down, her hind legs sort of skidding along underneath her. She had so much fun and she'd get home, covered with mud and really happy."

Our first indication that she was getting older and there was something amiss was when we'd go for walks along the riverbank and we came to a point where we used to come down some steps leading onto the street. Patch would come to this bank and wouldn't come down the steps but just stopped above this concrete bank where she just stood. She had no idea of how to get down. It was rather sad and became a regular occurrence. There was no doubt that she was getting a bit dotty, and had dementia. The vet later said he thought there might be a lesion on her brain.

Out on the farm, Patch twice fell into the stream by a small footbridge made of logs that gets very slippery when it gets wet. There were two occasions when Patch just fell off the bridge and into the stream completely, without warning. On the second occasion, John, the owner of the land, very kindly came and hoisted her up for me because I'm not sure how I was going to get her myself.

Pam and Patch's great adventure occurred on the eve of the national covid lockdown. Pam had had a busy day and we did some essential last-minute shopping. Pam decided she had to go to the farm to check the horses. Pam realised she needed a rest but carried on nevertheless.

Off we went to Makara in the small Toyota Yaris, Pam driving, Patch on the back seat.

Pam remembers feeling really sleepy. She stopped the car at one point, opened all the windows, took a few deep breaths, and thought "*Right I'm going to get out to the farm. And then I'm just going to lie down in the grass and have a snooze*". She willed herself to go on and get there.

At some stage, travelling through the very windy Takarau Gorge Road that runs alongside a stream on one side and the hills on the other, Pam simply could not stay awake and succumbed to sleep.

She describes what happened next:

"I'd fallen asleep at the wheel, and the car had drifted quietly over to the other side of the road through a very rickety, old wire fence and down a bank, landing on a very mossy stream bed with no sharp rocks or anything. It took me a few minutes to register what had happened. 'I've actually had an accident' and the car was upside down; Patch was on the back. I very quickly realised that the first thing I had to do was to get the seatbelt off, f because I could feel water coming up close to my chin, even though the stream wasn't deep at the time"

It seemed to Pam as if somebody was telling me what to do. *"Right, climb into the back of the car"*. She couldn't get out through the front because the driver's door was wedged down in the stream bed.

"The back of the car was up higher so I climbed in between the seats and there was my darling Patch. I was able to open the back door and get out and Patch sort of floated out after me."

Meanwhile, a lovely young man turned up on his bike and was calling out to me from the road and making phone calls. I called out, *"yes I'm fine"*. So, I had to help Patch and myself out of the stream. The water was pretty low - and up the bank onto the road and wrapped her up to keep her warm. Eventually, somebody rang the police. Eventually, a very nice policeman came all the way from Porirua. He very kindly drove me and Patch all the way home, Patch in the back of a police car".

Meanwhile, before we left, Pam had rung her friend, to ask if she could let me know she had had an accident and would be home soon. So, Dido very kindly came around to let me know. Dido and I were having a cup of tea when Pam and Patch arrived home. I remember Pam being soaked and Patch "smiling" - both full of adrenaline.

Patch continued declining and lived until April 2022.

On the last evening, Pam gave Patch a bone and she took it outside my window. She went out to check on her and knew immediately that Patch was in trouble. She couldn't get up.

That was about 9 p.m. We both loaded her into the car and Pam drove to the after-hours vet in Ngauranga where she found the same vet Pam had met once before when she took Patch to the vet. He came out to the car and examined Patch. He said, *"Well, that's a sure sign that something's happened quickly, probably a tumour, because the gums are very white"*.

He euthanised Patch there. It was very peaceful.

Pam had sent a text message to Dido when she was at the vet asking if she would meditate for Patch. Dido saw a vision of Patch running joyously, as if liberated and going to the Afterlife.

Pam and I didn't have any visions as we had with Mishka, but Pam had a dream a couple of days later in which she saw Patch running joyously through the bush.

We had a lovely burial. Our friend, Paul dug a big hole for Patch and we buried her with her beloved Teddy. and we lowered her in and covered her up.

When Pam brought Patch back the previous night we laid her on the couch. 12 hours after the vet had put her to sleep, she was still just quite soft. There seemed to be no rigour mortis. Pam was able to pick her up in her arms, covered in a blanket and out to her grave at the back of the garden.

Pam remembered that one of the things we were giving her towards the end that seemed to be really helping, and the vet was quite interested in, were tiny drops of cannabis oil. That seemed to help her with her pain, possibly right through to the end

If our beloved Mishka was a 4C boy then Patch was a 5A girl, She was super-intelligent as befits her breed, very sensitive, hyper-active when young and very interactive and loving.

One year on we still miss her.







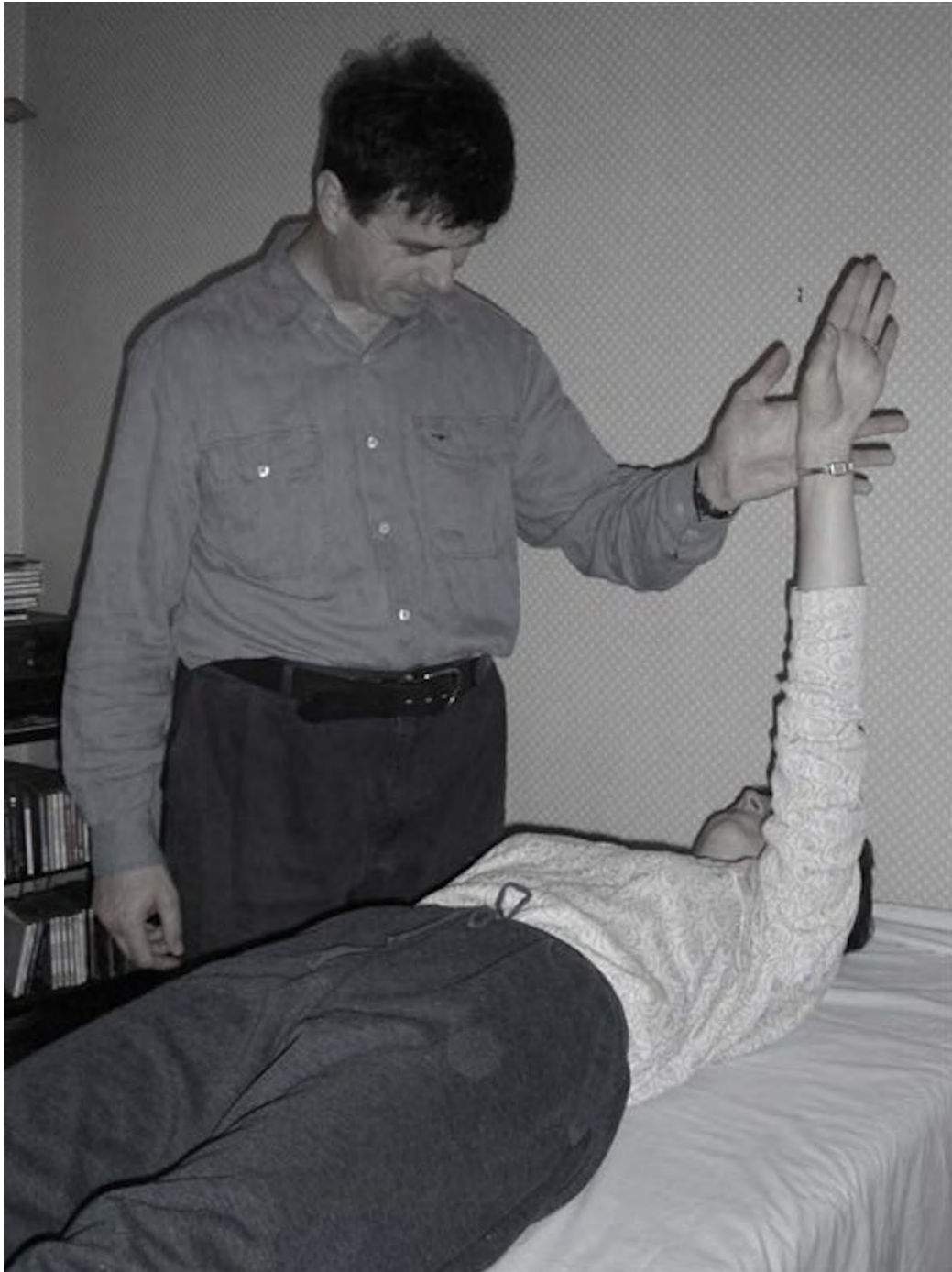
The older Patch



Patch body remained in a relaxed state 12 hours after her death

Part Four:

My involvement with Medicine



Practising NAET at home

Chapter 21 - Acupuncture

The money I inherited from my father allowed me to engage in a 4-year diploma course in acupuncture and Traditional Chinese Medicine.

It was a robust course run by the School of Acupuncture run by Olatunji. I came during a transition time when the course was determined by the school, and not by the Qualifications Authority. That meant I received a good grounding in the theory and practice of Chinese Medicine.

Looking back in hindsight, it was an excellent training.

One aspect of it was the fundamentals of Western Medicine that we had to learn. I felt resentful at the time, but that knowledge stood me in good stead during the covid era when the whole science of immunology was reinvented and turned on my head. I had sufficient knowledge of how the immune system and herd immunity works and to know that the whole narrative we are now being fed is false. It also gave me some tools to understand much of what I am hearing when experts like Geert vanden Bossche talk.

I often see things from the point of view of Chinese Medicine these days.

One example would be when talking about pathogens (they do exist in Chinese medicine) or about immunity. I can almost recall Olatunji 25 years later, almost word-for-word. He said,

"If Wei Qi (protective Qi or immune function) is low then the body says, 'Come on in'.

It explains a lot of things, such as how some viruses are not resolved but remain latent in the body. Modern western medicine has little explanation for this.

I spent four years getting trained in Chinese differential diagnosis while I learned that doctors who would do weekend courses in acupuncture and practised what we call *"cookbook acupuncture"* would arrogantly assert that THEY were best qualified to practise the discipline.

These same general practitioners have now been encouraged to give up differential diagnosis in their own profession. What they practise is increasingly protocol medicine. Could that be described as cookbook medicine?

Although I am no longer practising acupuncture or Chinese Medicine it has provided me with a template for understanding things that are happening.

In my fourth year, I travelled to Sri Lanka on a memorable trip with fellow students, Michelle and John, to gain clinical practice and to gain clinical hours at home. I spent a memorable month working in the acupuncture clinic run by the memorable Prof. Anton Jayasuriya at the Kalubowila Hospital in Colombo. This gave me a unique opportunity to

work with many, many patients in a clinical setting, albeit in very different circumstances from anything I would encounter back home.

I also had a chance to do some travelling with Pam, who had just had her melanoma excised; she came over to Sri Lanka with Tess, John's wife

After graduating from my course in 2000 I started a practice at Wellington People's Resource Centre where I provided a service at a low cost. I then found a room in Petone and practised there. I remember writing to all the GPs around but didn't get any replies, bar one.

I was approached by a Dr Mark Austin who had bought a property in Petone and wanted to set up a multidisciplinary medical centre in Petone. He wanted an acupuncturist and would I like to come on board? I agreed and moved to this new practice, hiring a room for two days a week.

I was quite busy in those days. I practised for a while in a shared room in Ghuznee Street as well as, later, at the Natural Health Centre. I also practised with Maurice and Katrina at the Clinic of Chinese Medicine in Mana, on the road north of Wellington. Neither of these two options was satisfactory and I left after some time. This was the case with an unsatisfactory stint at the Natural Health Centre in Wellington.

Perhaps because of my own health condition, I had always had an interest in treating people with immune and autoimmune conditions and did a lot of studies.

I had long been interested in the concept of muscle testing; I found more information on this during one of my locums. My interest was piqued, I did a lot of study on the internet and stumbled upon NAET (Nambudripad's Allergy Technique).

One thing led to another, and after some internet searches I found myself booking for a course with Dr Devi Nambudripad In Bali.

It was one of those things that appeared to happen fortuitously.

Dr Nambudripad was a larger-than-life character and could not have done what she did without a degree of eccentricity. I remember wondering, during the course, if I had done the right thing.

However, I brought this knowledge back home and decided to try it out. To my surprise, I found the technique surprisingly successful and within a fairly short period started to attract patients who felt a real change.

Eventually, I complimented the muscle testing with MSAS (Meridian Stress Assessment System) that I purchased at great expense from a Dr. Daniel Taylor. Due, mostly to the relatively short time I was practising, it never paid for itself and is still sitting in my office.

In hindsight, I don't think I'll be remembered for fixing someone's back with acupuncture.

Fifteen years later, Pam still meets people who, when they know who I am, tell her how much I had helped them or their children. Some have said that the changes were long-lasting. Perhaps the help they received from NAET helped them long enough so they could 'grow out' of their eczema or other allergic condition?

I practised for almost 11 years.

The first six years were the most intense. I was in demand and even had people coming to me from other parts of the country, in one case, on multiple occasions. Many of them were seriously affected and had run the full gamut of the medical system, were not helped, to put it mildly, or suffered from gaslighting by those they had put their trust in.

I was strongly motivated to help those that came to me. My own health was delicate, to say the least, and I strongly suspect it took a strong toll. I was warned of that by a very supportive peer. If I could have treated people for routine cases and interspersed that with the allergy and chronic fatigue cases, it may have been less of a strain. But there was no doubt, I was in demand.

I am particularly haunted by the memory of one patient, Haydn, who came to see me with terrible reactions to food after being prescribed a drug, *cispride*, for a gastrointestinal condition. The response of his Indian doctor, when encountered by Haydn's strong reactions, was just to increase the dose of a dangerous drug. By the time he came to me, he was in a bad way and the last time I saw him he was using a walking frame. I have often, in subsequent years, what has happened to him. Although I was unable to help him I think just the fact that I listened to him and believed him, would have made a difference.

This is an extreme example. I was the last resort for many, many patients who had found their way after being failed miserably by the medical system.

They were ignored and even gaslighted, being told by their doctors that there was nothing wrong with them and it was "*all in their heads*". I often wonder how people like this have fared in the covid era; what they are being told now; how many were bullied into having the covid jab; how many have been seriously damaged further, (or worse) by the "vaccine".

In the end, it was not my skills, or lack of them that was the limiting factor; it was my own health.

I wish to talk about Pam's story.

In about 2003 Pam, who had a few years earlier, while I was in Sri Lanka, had a melanoma removed from her hand

Subsequently, she discovered that she had a secondary tumour in her armpit.

All of this was a huge emotional stress for me and I recall trying to look after Pam at home trying to balance that with a busy practice. I remember treating one rather demanding patient from home in our basement yoga studio.

It was at about this time that my health started collapsing.

I went to see Dr Daniel Taylor with his Meridian Stress Assessment (MSAS) system. He determined that I had been exposed to the pesticide, Paraquat, and sent me home with some homoeopathic remedies.

The very day I had that devastating news.

I came home to a message from Pam's doctor. The news was that the biopsy showed Pam had a secondary melanoma in her lymphatic system.

I had to drop all my own concerns and concentrate on looking after Pam intensively for some time.

Pam noticed that what she felt in her hand was getting bigger and darker.

“One night I was working on a computer at home and I could actually feel it tingling and I knew that it wasn't right. It felt as if there was activity happening there. It was no longer a sort of a neutral space. So I went to the doctor and got it checked. Unfortunately, the biopsy did come back as a melanoma.”

Pam was referred to the team at the Burns Unit of the Hutt hospital, and in quite a short time, was in hospital and had it excised. The wound healed up and Pam was able to join John and me in Sri Lanka.

A couple of years later, when Pam was experiencing a lot of pressure and stress at work, the melanoma came back. Pam felt a lump under her arm. It wasn't huge,

“I just noticed it just didn't feel right. And it was also my sense of my own body. It wasn't just the physical feeling of a lump but I sensed that there was something going on”.

Pam went to her GP; she thought it was fine, but decided to take a biopsy just in case; it came back showing that there was level 2 melanoma. That meant that it was in my lymphatic system and was therefore a dangerous cancer.

Pam was prioritised and soon found herself in hospital having it removed. After the operation, Pam was told by her surgeon that the cancer hadn't travelled anywhere; It was isolated in one lymph node but they took pretty much all the lymph nodes out from under my left arm, meaning that Pam had to be very careful with any infections.

In consultations at the hospital, we were told that this was a cancer very much linked to the immune system and that chemotherapy was ineffective.

Once, I got melanoma a decade later, Prof. Hersey's trial had been cancelled and chemotherapy was in vogue again.

Pam discovered that there was very little, or no aftercare offered in New Zealand, other than monitoring

Eventually, through word of mouth, Pam found out about Prof. Hersey at the Sydney melanoma clinic who was carrying out a long-term trial of a vaccine-based treatment for melanoma.

Prof Hersey had described this as being similar to a smallpox vaccination; it was designed to stimulate the production of T-cells to fight invading cancer cells.

Pam was very nervous about mentioning her intention of going to Sydney to see Prof. Hersey to her oncologist, Carol Johnson.

When Pam bit the bullet and mentioned this to her, Carol told her that there was a similar randomised, double-placebo trial in Brisbane, this was something that she failed to mention at any stage until Pam raised it.

She offered nothing; Instead, she frightened Pam with statistics about survival rates.

Pam was not of a mind to take part in a trial where she could be given a placebo, so she chose to go to Sydney; she was met with no objection from the oncologist.

We both travelled to Sydney where we met Prof. Hersey, a wonderful man, motivated only by the desire to help his patients.

The word was, at the time, that of all the New Zealanders who had gone to Sydney for treatment, not one had died.

Pam had regular doses of the vaccine given to her at the Manuka Health Centre with regular blood tests for cancer markers that are never ever used otherwise by the medical system to diagnose cancer - in fact, I have learned that it is frowned on.

In addition, Pam resorted to several other remedies. We bought a vegetable juicer and Pam started Gerson therapy, which involved vegetable juices and regular coffee enemas to work the toxins out of the system.

On the first day of her therapy, Pam went to the hospital after her first strong dose of a lot of celery in it

"I could almost feel like going "Oh, my liver isn't used to this. It was really powerful"

Whilst waiting, Pam fainted. The staff were alarmed and asked Pam if she had a cold.

Pam also started using Chinese herbs prescribed to her.

We also used a NAET protocol provided directly by Dr Nambudripad. This involved treatment with the electronic signature of the sample of the tissue that had been taken out of Pam's body along with a whole treatment protocol,

Pam also did a lot of *Qi Gong* and had one-on-one healing sessions with a Qi Gong master.

Pam reflects:

"I like this Buddhist teaching of merit; I just remember saying it's as if I had this big barrel that I could draw from when I needed it. It was there, because I had helped lots of other people in my time in different ways. Somehow, I had this big reservoir to draw on by way of friendship and support. I had this strong spiritual strength".

All of this helped Pam to completely recover (as of almost twenty years later), but all of it is frowned upon, to put it mildly, by the medical Establishment. The best one can hope for, if one mentions it, is silence. Meanwhile, at the time, treatment stopped with the surgery. Now, they have gone back to using chemotherapy.

All of this paints a pretty dire picture of the New Zealand medical system, even when compared to the Australian system. This was 20 years ago.

Now, the situation is even worse.

The very things that would help people to recover were frowned upon. If things were bad then, they were still worse in ten years when I was treated for the same condition.

I can only imagine how things are for people "post-covid".

In fact, I know

Even conventional treatments available elsewhere were not mentioned and all that was offered after surgery was some form of monitoring. I remember the oncologist frightening Pam with the statistics of how many people would die from melanoma and who would die.

I had my own health concerns aside from Pam's diagnosis to look after Pam in every way I could.

Eventually, Pam's old friend, Dido, turned up from England and stayed with us. I still remember the conversation at the kitchen house and more or less told me to my face that I could butt out, and SHE would look after Pam. Dido suffered from devastating ME (chronic fatigue) and so was totally incapable of looking after Pam in any meaningful way, say by vacuuming or doing the wash-up.

Needless to say, I felt very locked out in my home, and not for the first time, I hasten to say.

All of this took a huge toll on me. One of the ways Dido helped Pam was to take her away on holiday, while I was left on my own over the holiday period; I spent most of that time in bed.

One way in which Dido was able to help me was to tell me about Dr Matt Tizard. who had been treating her on frequent visits to Auckland.

Dr Tizard was renowned for treating people for pesticide and chemical poisoning and predictably was chunked out of his medical practice by the authorities for his success.

I decided to go and consult with Dr Tizard so I drove up to Auckland with Dido. I remember being so unwell that Dido, with her chronic fatigue, did most of the driving.

Staying with my brother, I travelled over to the North Shore to see Dr Tizard.

Using his more primitive version of the *Meridian Stress Assessment System* (MSAS) that I was to use in my own practice, he determined that I had been exposed to a pesticide I had not heard of, Acetochlor and that I had a *miasm* (in homoeopathy an inherited weakness or predisposition) and was prescribed a homoeopathic remedy and went into a hyperbaric oxygen chamber.

I recall asking Dr Tizard about exposure to Paraquat, but his response had all the arrogance of a general practitioner: he told me that if I had been exposed to Paraquat I would be feeling a whole lot sicker. Perhaps Dr Taylor's remedy neutralised the paraquat? I don't know.

But this is the story of my life - being told by medical practitioners (or defrocked medical practitioners) that there was nothing seriously wrong with me. Even as I write this a feeling of bitterness comes over me, along with other events that I shall cover in the next chapter.

This brought a whole new aspect to my NAET practice - the diagnosis of pesticide exposure and that made me busy.

In 2006 I re-established contact with my old friend and Russian lecturer, Henry Wrassky, who said he was going on a trip to Russia and would I go with him as a helper? I agreed and had the last of many trips abroad. I was able to reacquaint myself with Moscow, visit Poland, Germany and have a week in England with my sister. It was, in hindsight, an ill-conceived decision for I was at the beck-and-call of an old man in his 80's, (except when I wasn't needed).

When I came back my practice never went back to its previous state and I found a lot more of my time was taken up with other pursuits, such as horse riding.

I experienced other signs of deteriorating health, such as insomnia that came out of tension in the body, rather than overthinking. I increasingly used to feel sick and unwell when I woke up. On competitive trail rides, I would feel sick, but this would often resolve itself on the ride. However, by the end of the day, I would feel exhausted.

I started preparing for what would be the ride of a lifetime - a trek in the Kaimanawas, in the centre of the North Island. I had a new western saddle; I had had work done on it and I bought hoof boots for the occasion.

I set off on a ride with Biscuit to try out the boots and was going up a fairly steep hill. When I adjusted to his movements, the girth on the saddle snapped and I was catapulted onto the ground.

When I came to, I realised that I had broken my arm. That led to events that, once again, completely changed my life

Chapter 22 - Problems with the Medical Establishment

While I was still lying on the ground I observed how Biscuit stood in one place and shook his saddle off, attached to him only by the loose rear girth and hanging by his belly. After this he wandered off to graze, some distance off. I retrieved him and we walked down the hill together.

The very moment we saw another human being the adrenaline wore off and I started to experience great pain. Eventually, an ambulance arrived and they took me to hospital at what seemed excruciatingly slow. They gave me laughing gas but that seemed worse than the paroxysms of pain every time there was the smallest bump in the road.

It turned out that I had a broken humerus; it was the first time I had broken a bone in my life. The treatment I had at the hands of the orthopaedic unit of Hutt Hospital gives new meaning to the word, insensitivity.

After a while, I started to see a few patients at home. How I managed I do not recall. Mostly grit and determination, I suspect.

I spent many hours just lying on my bed and began to feel sensations that were unfamiliar and had nothing to do with a broken bone. This was the first sign that something serious was amiss.

Eventually, the plaster came off and I was referred to a physiotherapist where the treatment was nothing short of brutal. Through a friend, we found another physiotherapist some distance off.

During those treatments, I continued to feel strange and unfamiliar unpleasant sensations in my body. Just before Christmas, I experienced oedema in my ankles. I got to see my doctor, Mark Austin, on the last day of practice. To his great credit, he sent me straight off to the emergency department of the hospital. I went with Pam and her friend, Dido, where I was seen by a doctor who was determined to get to the bottom of things and was not going to let me go without an answer.

It may seem as you read further that I am prejudiced against all doctors. This man was very good. Going through my history he honed in on a low-grade, but persistent cough I had been experiencing for some time. After many hours, he came up with a diagnosis of *sarcoidosis*, an autoimmune condition that affects the lungs and he prescribed a course of prednisone for me.

When we came back from the hospital I was feeling very vulnerable. Our visitor, Dido, told me in no certain terms that I would just have to get used to having a chronic condition, all delivered in a voice that seemed hard and condescending. I was beyond upset.

Any attempt to sort it out, including a formula I had learned from the monastery of both sides to a dispute asking for forgiveness from the other, was doomed to failure. There would be no forgiveness or request for forgiveness.

Any remonstrations on my side were met by angry tears and complaints that I had upset her greatly. I was the one to blame.. If I was looking for even partial recognition of responsibility it was not forthcoming.

Once again, I felt unwelcome in my own house when I was at my lowest point, by the same person as she took up much of Pam's time with "*supervision sessions*", which, I think revolved around some writing project she was working on at the time.

I spent many hours on my bed, feeling very ill and very alone, going over in my mind the whole situation.

That is how I felt at the time and how I remember it to this day.

Over the years, however, I have grown to love Dido. We have one major thing in common. We have both been exposed to toxic pesticides in our lives and suffered from chronic fatigue. We both have a shared experience of being failed by conventional medicine. I would like to think I have shown compassion and empathy towards Dido as her health has collapsed. When she first had symptoms of oedema that led to her being diagnosed with a kidney disease I was the one that strongly suggested that she go to the hospital. We have a common experience of bad treatment at the hands of the medical industry.

The effects of the prednisone were devastating. Pam still recalls to this day her worry as I was on the ground at the farm. She was anxious that I wasn't going to be able to get up. She may have been experiencing something for the first time which has since become commonplace over the years.

I had lung X-rays done after finishing my course of steroids and I had an appointment with a young registrar who told me proudly that my lungs were almost back to normal. He was, I think, telling me that my condition was resolved.

I asked him, if I was getting better why was I feeling WORSE? No answer was forthcoming.

That was the start of a 12-year history of being disregarded by doctors and having my worsening condition ignored. What follows is that history.

While taking the course of steroids I went back to work. By then, I was seeing only a few clients and my heart was no longer in it.

I never entirely accepted the sarcoidosis diagnosis as being the correct one.. After all, while my lungs seemed to improve, my condition did not. I was very worried that I had a more serious condition; my suspicion was cancer.

My relationship with Dr Austin deteriorated. I think that after the sarcoidosis diagnosis, he lost interest in me despite the fact that he was a colleague. He prescribed some blood tests and I was very anxious about what they might reveal. I was sitting at home during a lunchtime break and I received an email from Dr. Austin, asking if I could come to see him in his office, URGENTLY.

I turned up, imagining the worst. What he did, instead was to bail me out over an email I had sent laying out my concerns about how I was being treated.

That was it. I packed up all my stuff and left the centre that afternoon, informing Dr. Austin that I was leaving. That was it; the end of 11 years of practice at the Manuka Health Centre and the end of a relationship that I had thought of as collegial. The man, with what seemed a constant snarl on his face, had shown himself

I think, in hindsight, he was a lazy practitioner who lost interest in his patients very quickly. In fact, I was told this by another GP. I don't think he was ever that empathetic, although his decision to practise functional medicine should have implied he was.

Once, some years earlier, during Pam's battle with melanoma, I asking him about a large mole on my midriff that was concerning Pam. When I mentioned this to him he just laughed it off. It was clear he didn't want to do any tests.

As it turned out. I eventually DID get melanoma. The doctor that I went to at the time, also initially dismissed it, as Pam's GP had, but must have thought better of it, for he called me by phone after the appointment and called me back that afternoon to have it removed for a biopsy, which came back and showed that I did, indeed, have a melanoma.

I was in the hospital within weeks, for an operation. The operation was effective. On the morning after the operations during his rounds, the surgeon did not ask me any questions about how I was but was only interested in why as a *«young and healthy person»* (sic) I had taken out a *“do not resuscitate”* order. He repeated this at a subsequent follow-up appointment. I can scarcely convey the vehemence and even aggression with which this message was delivered and the effect this boorishness had on me.

In the "covid" era, non-resuscitation orders became quite the thing, just so long as the initiative did not come from the patient. In fact, at one point PM Jacinda Adern's government at one stage floated the idea of making those with "covid" "eligible" for *“assisted dying”*.

I started going to a very good craniosacral osteopath. Gerry Ryan. Gerry comes from the UK school, where not only did he study osteopathy but also conventional medicine at a level just short of full medical training. He confirmed for me most of what I expected, and started doing treatments that unfortunately always made me feel worse (an *“aggravation”*), but without any substantive improvement. That, sadly, has been my experience in recent years with other detox programs.

Eventually, Gerry referred me to an anthroposophical doctor, William Crawford.

William listened to me and took me seriously, to the extent of listening to my argument that testing for cancer markers, something that had been used with Pam during her vaccine therapy and sending me for tests; "*they won't like it*", he said.

William was, unlike any GP before him, always courteous, respectful and humorous - in short, everything I could look for in a general practitioner. His approach was the very illustration of what I heard recently on a podcast by Dr Larry Pavlovsky. Just listening to the patient is 99% of what is needed in a medical practitioner.

He tried various anthroposophical remedies, but to no avail. However, success was not necessarily the first thing on my mind by this stage.

He TRIED.

As an example of his approach, in one consultation he asked me, "*What WOULD you like me to do, Robin?*". My response was, "*Nothing*". It was that sort of respect that wins me over. Not one medical practitioner has ever asked me that before or, especially, since.

William was the last medical practitioner I spoke to who ever referenced my diagnosis of sarcoidosis. Sarcoidosis remained buried deep in my file; it was never referenced or taken seriously again.

The main problem for me was that Dr Crawford divided his time between practices here and in Canada. At some stage, fairly early on, he moved his practice from the anthroposophical centre to the Connolly St Medical Centre, next door.

From then, everything started to unravel quite quickly.

The first thing was that I went through a couple of medical emergencies (including melanoma) which sent me to the hospital. Unfortunately, Dr Crawford was not present for any of them.

The second thing was that I had to use other practitioners at the Centre - you could not really call them locums. Not one of them was in the least familiar with my history, or that interested. When I came to see them they seemed to ad-lib it. My perception is that they were either incompetent or had personalities that could be best described as a "*tricky ego*" when it came to chronic conditions. In one case, the doctor was, in my mind, a borderline narcissist

That is quite an accusation, so let me tell a few stories and you can make up your own mind.

The problems started in 2014. In one of Dr Crawford's absences, I was offered an appointment with a Dr. Julie. She was an English doctor, minted in the UK's National Health System. She was quite personable. We had quite long consultations, in which I tried to explain (with the help of my partner, Pam) the seriousness of my condition. She told me she had looked through my files (without having noticed, seemingly the large gap

in the file or the serious diagnosis), but did not appear to regard it as necessary to refer me for any tests (except for, perhaps the very routine range of blood tests).

Rather, her contribution was to query whether I had "*considered the psychological-emotional aspects*" of the case and referred me to an online survey designed to prove to me that I was depressed.

Based on this "considered" diagnosis I determined that I would not return to the practice while Dr. Crawford was still absent. Instead, I decided that if there were symptoms of concern I would go to the A & E Department of the hospital instead.

I disregarded a "summons" from the chief doctor, Dr Erich but got a second call that seemed quite urgent, from the centre. I got quite worried and wondered if there may be something quite concerning, so I reconsidered and made an appointment.

In fact, there was no urgency at all.

It turned out that Dr Erich just wanted to discuss the general aspects of the case. I had always assumed that, outside some emergency, it was up to the patient to make an appointment based on need, rather than being called in this way. Again, Dr Kusel was very personable, if not over-familiar. I remember, on meeting him, saying to him I wanted someone honest. He replied airily, "*I'm your man!*"

Why the great interest? Did he want to take me over as his patient?

Dr Erich did show quite a lot of interest. He was indeed quite thorough and asked quite a few questions. He even did a physical examination and referred me for routine blood tests while seeming to shrug off my partner's strong desire to have other tests (such as an MRI) done.

It seemed to me that he just wanted to ignore anything that had come before and start from scratch.

He noticed that I was suffering from gum disease and prescribed a session with the hospital dentist. He also expressed concern that I was overweight ("*obese*", he said"). He put me on a diet based on completely cutting out sugars and all carbohydrates.

He was totally deaf to my contention (based on my long experience), that both conditions were secondary to a deeper condition; he PROMISED me, "*Lose weight and you will feel at least 50% better!*".

As if!

I have a problem with doctors' "dabbling".it would be better if they would practise within their scope of practice and refer to those who have a deeper knowledge

The diet did lead to an immediate loss of weight and to precisely ZERO improvement in

my well-being. In fact, my well-being further declined during this period and I put on some weight over the months between appointments.

Somewhat at the insistence of Pam, who was alarmed at the decline in my condition, we went back to see Dr. Kusel for another session. His considered opinion again expressed definitively, but not backed up, when told about my lack of sleep, was that I had sleep apnoea. This presumably followed on from his previous diagnosis of obesity. No hypothesis, no if's or but's, no follow-up treatment: "*You've got sleep apnoea!**. Another bullshit diagnosis.

When I challenged him on this, he referred me to a list of symptoms on a website. You just try hitting a doctor with anything from a website!

When Pam voiced her own concerns and gave her observations his snooty response was, "*Medicine needs to be evidence-based*".

At one point, Dr Erich conducted a series of physical examinations, during which he noted an abnormally rapid heart rate and mentioned the possibility of angina. However, it seemed that he immediately changed his mind for he did not suggest any further tests related to it, even though it aligned with my symptoms of exhaustion and chest pains. When I inquired about this, he abruptly fell back on differential diagnosis, arguing that there were factors inconsistent with that particular diagnosis.

Fair enough, but what about causing your patient anxiety and then just changing the subject?

At one stage I was sent out to the bathroom to take a urine sample (to test for a possible urine infection). While I was away Pam voiced her extreme alarm at my condition and referenced my historical diagnosis of sarcoidosis. This seemed to take the doctor completely by surprise. Pam reported he seemed quite shocked. He immediately referred me URGENTLY for chest X-rays.

What was perfectly routine a few minutes before suddenly became urgent. No one, it appeared, had ever bothered to read my file and no one did what, as a former practitioner of Chinese Medicine, I would have regarded as routine, and asked about my history.

Not only that, it transpired that a large part of my electronic file was missing, seemingly corrupted in the transfer from one medical centre to another.

When I went for the X-rays at the hospital, I got copies of a good part of my medical record for the period. I took these to Dr. Erich who I saw later the same morning for a follow-up consultation.

I confronted Dr Erich, (somewhat angrily and aggressively, I have to say), with my contention that my files had been lost and nothing had been done to rectify the matter. I also said that conclusions had been reached (that were both upsetting and stressful to me), without any reference to my medical history.

Rather than responding with "*I'm sorry*", or even a "*I'm sorry you feel this way*", the response was testy and self-justifying; "*How dare you criticise the receptionist!*"

Could the good doctor slip up? No way!

I showed him an item, a report on my sarcoidosis from the hospital from my file. His response was, "*Yes, I have this. It is a good report*" Was this the same man who had panicked because he had failed to pick up my sarcoidosis on my file?

Very angry at this stage, I exclaimed that I was considering making a complaint to the Health and Disability Commissioner. His immediate response was "*What can I do to induce you not to take this course of action?*". This was followed by an offer of a free treatment, something I took to be a bribe, which I turned down. I went to pay. Dr. Kusel rushed out to the reception and said he had a "special scheme" to help people who had difficulty paying.

Something like that.

He repeated his offer of a free treatment, to which my response was "*I won't look a gift horse in the mouth*", and accepted.

That was the last time I consulted with Dr Erich. That's your "borderline narcissist" for you.

My problems with insomnia were getting pretty bad, so I mentioned this to Dr Crawford and uncharacteristically requested some sleeping tablets. William was reluctant to prescribe anything for me out of concern for the side effects. I was fairly desperate so my response was, I said "*If I am to poison myself with something let it be a sleeping tablet - something that will give me a good night's sleep*"

He prescribed Ativan, a medicine that is primarily for anxiety and stress and only secondarily for sleep problems. But I didn't have problems with anxiety or stress, just a seriously overwrought nervous system. I suppose he was trying to prescribe the least damaging medication he could.

Good old Dr Crawford!

He had forgotten to hand over the script, so I had to ask for it. "*A Freudian slip*", he responded and then said to Pam, "*He won't like it*".

When I got home I looked at the insert and found listed some possible side effects of the medication that included dizziness and light-headedness, confusion, feeling aggressive or irritated, memory loss, moodiness, and itchy skin. Some of the same symptoms I already suffered from.

Now, I understood William's reluctance.

He had only prescribed a few tablets. I tried a few doses over a few days. I was still awake over 2 hours after taking the pill, and on one of those occasions had one night that was disastrous when I hardly got any sleep at all. Thankfully, there were none of the mentioned side effects - just insomnia.

By this stage, William was away again and I was offered an appointment with Dr. Julie. I remembered my last experience and reasoned, "*I am just going about a prescription. What could possibly go wrong?*", so I booked in with her.

But, what transpired reminded me of what my childhood friend, Stephen used to say, "*Cheer up. It could be worse. I did, and it did (get worse)*".

So, I went off to see Dr Julie. Without asking me what I wanted, she looked at my notes and started by referring to recent liver function tests and said they were *within range*". Before she could go back to where we finished off I said emphatically, "*You are not my doctor, I would prefer to discuss this with him*".

Imagine my consternation when she abruptly got up without a word and left the office in a huff.

After what seemed an age she came back and finally asked what I wanted. "*Clearly, they weren't working for you*", she opined. "*What do you want?*" and reeled off a list of various medications used for sleeplessness - "antidepressants, anti-psychotics, anti-histamines....".

What tablets did I want? "*Something that works, I don't know much about sleeping tablets*"

Even I know that benzodiazepines are not the only sleeping tablets on the market - even in this country. You'd have thought she might have explained or asked some more questions to determine which was the most appropriate. However, no questions were forthcoming

More and more irritated, when she came to the antihistamines bit I blurted out, "*Well, I'm not taking fucking antihistamines!*" Once again, she fled the office, screaming "*I won't take swearing!*"

There was a longer wait this time; she came back with the practice manager. "*Would you like someone else? Dr Erich is in in the afternoon*", said the nice practice manager.

You mean the doctor who offers bribes for silence?

"*No thanks*", I told them. "*I'll wait till my doctor gets back*"

I went home, seething with anger. It seemed to me that we patients are just consumers. We just have to walk carefully on the eggshells of doctors' brittle egos. After all, they hold all the power and it appears they don't like to be challenged.

On arriving home I immediately wrote a letter of complaint to the Centre, more or less

setting out the above as I saw it. I very soon got a reply from Dr Hugh, as "*Complaints Liaison Officer*". In it, he repeated what Dr Julie said to what she said to Dr Hugh as well as what she wrote up in her "*contemporaneous notes*".

"She reports that your behaviour towards her quickly became aggressive and abusive including swearing and very bad language. Dr Forsey reports that she has seldom experienced that degree of aggression and poor language in her 30 years of General Practice"

'She was upset by your behaviour and left the room to compose herself and in an attempt to defuse the situation. She had hoped that a break would allow you to consider your approach and modify your language and behaviour, which would then allow her to resume the consultation and offer you appropriate care in a less emotionally charged environment.'

"It appears that your aggressive and verbally abusive behaviour towards Dr Forsey, which was witnessed by Mrs Campbell, made it impossible for her to conduct an appropriate assessment of your needs at the time..."

"In the future, we will not book you in to see Dr Forsey, as she did not feel safe in the consultation with you."

He then reported that she had written this whopper:

"As she left you were shaking your stick at her in a threatening manner"

Aren't patients' notes supposed to be factual?

The fact of the matter was that I had talked emphatically, certainly never in an abusive manner and only blurted out one expletive in the whole time. My walking stick remained at my side throughout.

But, it appears, from Dr Hugh, that the doctor's word is sacrosanct while the hoy-polloy are reduced to being "customers", and not patients.

Before 2000, patients could choose which practitioner they went to, based on their decision of who they thought was the best, and most competent to treat them.

A fairly natural freedom, you'd think.

However, in 2000, the Labour government of the day changed the regulations. Now, one had to be registered with a medical practice. This meant one could no longer seek out the best-qualified doctor but essentially one became the property, not even of your doctor, but of the medical centre. This marked the start of the corporatisation of the medical profession. With this socialistic, top-down regulation I could not imagine a greater incentive for mediocrity and even malpractice.)

Whilst I accept that in some cases patients can be abusive and staff need some protection it is the "*non-tolerance*" bit in a corporate setting that bothers me.

I am mindful of a story I read from the dark dark days of the vaccine mandates. An

unvaccinated working-class man went to the hospital complaining that he was in severe pain. Not getting a helpful response he became agitated and repeated what he had said before, more emphatically with an expletive. Citing their non-tolerance towards swearing policy they refused to treat him.

He died shortly afterwards.

Dr Hugh agreed to a meeting for me to discuss the matter. At first, Dr Hugh wanted Dr Julie to be present but I quickly repulsed that idea. I took Pam and a psychotherapist friend, Rod, along with me. His presence may have changed the tone of the meeting.

While we were waiting, Dr Erich came through. It was clear that he didn't want to see me. He avoided my glaze and transited the room as quickly as he could.

They listened to what I had to say, which apparently I said passionately (without notes for I had forgotten to bring them). Dr. Hugh asked me what I wanted and I replied that I wanted an apology. That was given and a suggestion was made that in Dr Crawford's absence, I might like to see Dr Hugh. This suggestion was delivered in the nicest way possible, but eventually led to more problems down the line as I will point out in the next chapter.

It is interesting to note that both Dr Erich and Dr Julie have left the practice. Later, when the practice moved to another location and became truly corporate, Pam asked about Dr Julie and was told by the receptionist with a smirk, "*She's no longer with us*".

I wonder what that meant.

As it turned out, William was at the meeting, fresh back from Canada. He did not participate in the proceedings but just observed. He did offer one remark along the lines that perhaps I did not realise how forceful my personality can be. He said he was observing me and was concerned by some facial expressions- grimaced - and that he was going to refer me to the neurological department of the hospital.

Another thing I should mention is that around this time I developed some shaking in my hand, usually when under some stress.

I also found a solution to help my insomnia. I had written about my experiences on my blog and received an offer from a friend to try some cannabis oil that he had made up. Cannabis proved to be the one and only thing that has ever helped me. It still takes me a while to fall asleep but it has consistently relaxed me and given me a good night's sleep.

It is worth mentioning that on one occasion Dr Hugh said they didn't have any patients taking any medicinal cannabis oil and that I could be their "*test case*" (sic). I bet they still don't have any patients taking medicinal cannabis.

Subsequently, medicinal cannabis was legalised and tightly regulated only after the police arrested most of the "*green fairies*", who were doing God's work by providing for the terminally- and chronically ill with help. It was terrible legislation but it did allow me to

obtain a legal form of cannabis oil, albeit at very high prices.

Eventually, the shaking stopped, I suspect, thanks to the cannabis.

I went to Wellington Hospital for annual consultations with the neurological department. I have nothing but praise for the people there who were unfailingly thorough and courteous. During this time they did thorough testing. They did their best but failed to come up with a diagnosis for three years.

One of the things that they did was to refer me to thorough psycho-neurological testing with a pleasant doctor from Hong Kong, who has since left the hospital- somehow, I doubt if they have found a replacement. What he came up with was some significant memory loss in some areas of the brain, while other areas were still intact. What is significant is that, apart from with William, these test results, along with other tests, were never ever discussed with me, or even referenced.

In the end, a new young person appeared in the neurology unit. He decided on an interim diagnosis of *Parkinson's Plus* and wanted to put me on a medication called Levodopa. I started to do some research and found that it is based on glutamine but they add some ingredients that make it toxic. In addition, it seems it is not that effective long-term. On that basis, I decided not to take it.

I then had a visit from a pleasant lady from the Parkinson's Support Group. She urged me to persevere with the Levodopa. Unfortunately, I agreed and that was a disastrous decision.

I was supposed to come onto the drugs very gradually but Pam miscalculated and I took a dose larger than what it should have been. However, the massive reaction I had to the medication illustrated very clearly that this drug was not for me.

However, I think I knew that before.

I got a ring from the young neurologist just days before the 2020 covid lockdowns to check on me. When I told him I didn't think he believed me about the reaction ('side-effects'], so I handed the phone over to Pam. She was able to describe in detail what had happened in such a way that he agreed that I had indeed had an extreme adverse reaction. He agreed that Levodopa was the wrong medication and I should come off it. He also suggested that I could be taken off the books but could come back in the future if needed.

I doubt, with all the post-covid changes in the health system, and with the gatekeepers at the medical centre, whether that would be possible today.

One significant thing was that he apologised for not having been able to do more for me. That was quite a novelty, for I had never, to that point ever before, had an apology from anyone in the medical system or even so much as even a partial acknowledgement of failure.

I strongly suspect that my condition has nothing to do with Parkinson's or any other neurological condition known to modern medicine.

Days after this, Jacinda Adern's draconian covid lockdown began and with it, a new era.

Chapter 23 - Break with the medical system

I first heard of covid-19 in January 2020 and was immediately very alarmed and covered the issue on my blog.

It took a while for the Adern government to take it seriously but after they got their marching orders from the WHO they moved quickly.

A national lockdown in New Zealand was announced by PM Jacinda Adern, which was as draconian as anything else in the world. It covered the entirety of the country and lasted from 25 March 2020 until 13 May. This was followed by a lockdown in Auckland and the north, which lasted over 100 days.

Most noticeable, apart from the dire effects on New Zealanders was the country cutting itself off from the world for many months. Travel restrictions were introduced and all travellers entering New Zealand were required to undergo a mandatory 14-day quarantine period in a government-approved facility, including New Zealanders living abroad who were essentially trapped overseas.

The effect on New Zealand and especially businesses was catastrophic. I remember how the regulations were used to benefit large businesses such as supermarkets, while small businesses, especially those that benefited people on lower incomes, were targeted. I have no idea how many businesses went under and have no direct insight into the burdens carried by small businesses.

The article I consulted said, "*The travel restrictions were gradually lifted as the number of COVID-19 cases in New Zealand decreased*". This really is nonsense. Only about 25 or so people died **with** covid over that first year.

People only started getting very sick and dying in large numbers after the introduction of mass vaccination. The correlation is unmistakable despite efforts by government and media propagandists to pin the blame on Omicron, a mutation that produced effects comparable to a serious cold.

After a few weeks of following "cases" carefully I began to realise that the entire narrative was false and the real situation was different. During that first year, only 17 people died "with" covid during that period. These were elderly folk or those with serious preexisting conditions.

This was clearly out of all proportion to the draconian regulations that were introduced in the country. This included

Although my health was not at all good I only noticed changes at the very end of 2020. That summer I started to experience burning feet, along with changed sensations in the feet such as numbness and tingling.

I started looking for information on this and was somewhat alarmed by articles that linked this with conditions such as diabetes (which I do not have), and even kidney disease. This further correlated with high homocysteine levels being also associated with the latter,

I went armed with this information to a junior doctor at the medical centre. As someone straight out of medical school, he still displayed some desire to help. He was interested in what I had to say but I should book an appointment with Dr Hugh to discuss the matter.

Well, I needn't have bothered.

The first thing he did was to discuss the information I had provided on homocysteine in a way that made it look as if the information had come from him, not me, without adding anything valuable other than to cast some doubt on what was reliable research and information.

Then he placed me on the bed and looked at my reflexes. This was information that was about as relevant as routinely taking someone's blood pressure. All the tests were predictably normal.

There was no reference to possible tests mentioned in the literature. When I asked months later, even my podiatrist came up with a possible link with diabetes. But none of this from the good doctor. When we sat down he changed the subject. What seemed to interest him most was whether not only I but also Pam, who was there as support and had nothing to do with his practice (he had no right to ask that question of her), were going to take the vaccine. My response, I recall, was negative.

Pretty disgusted with this, I have not been to him or anyone else in the centre for 16 months.

I decided, in the summer of 2022-23, while recovering from my first bout of "covid-19"!, to break the silence by penning a letter to Dr Hugh, expressing my feelings. I started by pointing out that things had not changed and that my burning feet were not only the same but worse.

I emphasised, in bold letters that:

"This was an introduction and IN NO WAY a "call for help". I was summing up the symptoms that have never been addressed"

I went on to explain in no uncertain terms, how the system had failed me, even within its own parameters.

"For years I have brought an account of these symptoms to you without once having had a discussion of what could be going on, or questions asked which would allow for a differential diagnosis to then decide what physical tests should be done."

I went through my history, mentioning for the first time the scandalous attempt to bribe me by Dr Erich.

The letter was a challenge to him, to be honest. I told him:

"Either you are not sufficiently qualified to treat chronic conditions such as autoimmune diseases or chronic fatigue that go across several body systems, in which case you should have referred me to someone (if, indeed, they exist),"

I suspected there is an in-house policy not to take such conditions seriously, which would confirm my suspicions from experiences over the years. I referenced something called *somatization_symptom disorder*, which I have known about for years, from reading about it; the truth has been confirmed to me by authoritative websites. It is a dogma taught in medical schools, that if a condition is not self-limiting and if commonly-prescribed medical tests fail to come up with anything, it is regarded as psychosomatic – in the patient's head.

I also talked about the failure of contemporary medicine to practise differential analysis and to practise protocol medicine, which in the covid era essentially equates to cookbook medicine. My understanding is that differential diagnosis is essentially asking questions to differentiate between different conditions, forming a hypothesis and then confirming that with appropriate tests.

I was brazen enough to give an example from the covid era.

If a patient presents with respiratory distress the two main possibilities are a respiratory condition or a blood condition, such as altitude sickness. Further questions need to be asked and tests done to distinguish between the two to ensure that the correct treatment protocol is used. In the case of "covid-19" there are indications that what people in intensive care were suffering from was not a respiratory virus but something akin to altitude sickness. The practice of giving patients the drug remesdevir and putting them on a respirator was not only wrong but killed many, many people.

I wrote unambiguously that, *"I would really have liked an honest disclosure of what your true position is without hiding behind your position of 'authority' "*

I even predicted accurately what his response might be.

"I have a suspicion that you are going to regard me as a troublemaker and "suggest" I find another practitioner."

I admit that this was a very provocative letter to write to one's doctor but it came as the culmination of over a decade's experience.

It was very hard, in my mind, to misconstrue the message.

Yet that is exactly what he did.

He misused my one conciliatory statement, designed to soften the message, *"I look forward to a frank and honest discussion addressing what I have raised in this letter"*.

He fulfilled my prediction and did, indeed, construe all this as a *"cry for help"*.

His office brought my appointment forward to one at the very beginning of the day, an indication that he HAD read my letter. Then I got another call to say that Dr Hugh had prescribed some blood tests, intended to be done before I saw him, and could I pick up the script?

When I saw what tests were in mind I was shocked. It was a shopping list of every test you could imagine (and some). It was the very confirmation of everything I had written.

I was so angered by this that I rang the office with a request that he ring me. He confirmed that he had indeed taken my long letter as a *"cry for help"*. He had spent, said, *"3 hours on a public holiday"* perusing my file, perhaps for the first time since I had been seeing him.

His conclusion on going through my file was that I had chronic fatigue (*"popularly known as Tapanui flu"*) and he wanted to refer me to a geriatrician.

The insult to my intelligence was so great that I lost my temper and told him in no uncertain terms that I wanted nothing to do with his intentions.

During my 10 years as an acupuncturist, I treated many people for chronic fatigue and carried out extensive research, all at a time when the medical profession contemptuously

denied the very existence of such a condition.

To have this doctor then essentially tell me how to suck eggs was more than I could take. What I had been accused of several years before came to pass and I angrily blurted out that I thought he was incompetent (meaning, to treat a condition like chronic fatigue), and that I would come to the appointment but intended to record the session for my own safety. That could, indeed, be construed as "abusive".

That was too much for the doctor's ego and he wrote a letter back feeding back what I had said in a way that misrepresented it. It was self-justifying and distorted everything I had written to him. It was the actions of someone used to being looked up to as an authority and not used to being challenged.

His conclusion:

"I ... feel that the anger and hostility you have directed at me, as well as your concerns about my incompetence, has irretrievably damaged the doctor-patient relationship. For there to be a good outcome there needs to be mutual trust between the patient and doctor, and it does not exist in our case. I would not feel comfortable being your doctor in future".

Well, that was fine with me.

I had already made a firm determination that I would not cross his threshold for medical promises for he had already lost MY trust 2 years previously. The only reason I would ever come to see him was to discuss the contents of my letter.

I wrote one more letter, annotated this time, clarifying once more what I had said and deconstructing what he had written to me.

Despite all my experiences over the years, I was not prepared for the dishonesty of this doctor and his willingness to misconstrue things, almost to the point of lying, to defend their own power and authority as well as their ego.

Even in the covid era.

I have made the difficult decision, backed up by all the horror stories of abuse of patients turning for help to doctors and hospitals, to forgo medical treatment. That is a difficult decision to make because I am aware that my health condition may demand hospital treatment in the future.

However, my personal experience, combined with anecdote, tell me that any time in hospital is very likely to have a good outcome unless I am jabbed with a bioweapon containing nanotechnology (*"fully vaccinated"*).

After all, the unvaxxed have been refused treatment in this country.

As things stand I'd rather die at home.

I have added as a postscript the correspondence with personal details edited out.

Chapter 24 - The vaccination era

According to the official website of the New Zealand government, as of December 31, 2020, there were a total of 25 deaths in New Zealand with COVID-19. The propaganda tells us this low death count was due to the successful policies of Jacinda Adern in keeping the virus by draconian methods.

Since then, according to the Worldometer, there have been 4,448 deaths.

What could possibly account for this rapid increase?

The government and media tells us that this was because of a new mutation, Omicron. But medicine tells us that Omicron is less virulent (but more contagious) than the original form of "covid-19"

It is hard not to see a direct correlation between the increased death count and the introduction of mass vaccination.

The direct correlation between the number of deaths "from covid" is unmistakable unless one has a reason not to believe in it. As soon as the "vaccines" were introduced into the population the deaths went up. But, we are told, this is due to the effectiveness of Auntie Jacinda in keeping the dangerous bug out of the country with a draconian lockdown that mostly affected New Zealanders, but had all sorts of exceptions for the people the government wanted.

We noticed that quite a few people that we knew, directly or indirectly , started dying suddenly and unexpectedly. Of course, people could have died from "other" causes. Oddly, the old coinkydink raises its head: "*Everything is a coincidence*". It shows that folk will believe anything when they are in fear and subject to 24/7 propaganda with zero tolerance for any dissident views, no matter how reasonable and supported by the evidence they are.

Relying on what was happening around us and unofficial sources this reached an apex around the time Jacinda Adern held her "'Vaxathon' in October 2021, (bringing back memories of the telethons of the 1970s, designed to raise charity). This was a time when it was difficult to get medical attention. Most consultations were done over the phone. But perhaps the main thing was that there were long waits for ambulances; in the case of our friend, Dido, who needed urgent hospital care, 4 hours - both the ambulance hub and the hospital were only 5 minutes' drive from where she lived.

There was always the suspicion that those helicopters that were flying overhead, might have been taking people to the hospital. Everywhere in the world people were dropping dead. They even had a special term for it; "*sudden death syndrome*" but in 2022, after vaccines were introduced for children we started to see children with heart conditions. In 2023 we have seen reports of heart conditions in infants.

I started collating official statistics which showed that covid is a "*pandemic of the vaccinated*". By far the majority of people in hospital for covid were vaccinated, especially those who had received boosters. All this despite attempts to combine the unvaccinated with others not "eligible" for vaccination, including, at the time, young children. This proportion increased but at a certain point, when it became too obvious, and after health pundits, such as Prof. Michael Baker claimed that if you were unvaccinated you were much more likely to end up in hospital. All this flew in the face of even the official data that anyone such as me could look up. Of course, he had data to prove his contention but it was never produced. Instead, the government simply stopped publicising (and presumably collating the data. The public was not allowed to know the truth.

It was early in the mass vaccination campaign that Jacinda Adern, when asked if she was producing a "two-tier society" of vaccinated and not vaccinated, she replied, "*That's exactly what it is*". Adern, who had earlier told people not to talk with their neighbours because they might "*catch covid*" from a chance encounter, and had denied that vaccination would be compulsory, introduced a sweeping vaccine mandate that with policing by private firms, became almost universal. The unvaccinated, despite the evidence, were targeted and treated as if they were lepers. If anyone "caught covid" everyone looked to blame the unvaccinated who strangely were much healthier than their vaccinated friends. It has now got so preposterous, almost halfway through 2023 that a friend who has had every vaccination going, was herself accused of "*spreading covid*".

Everyone who remained unvaccinated felt it, and feels it still. Although the mandates have allegedly been dropped still to this day, not one of the nurses, doctors, midwives or teachers, mandated out of their jobs has been taken back. This while the country is suffering from the breakdown of the health system and there are dire shortages of medical staff.

In our personal sphere, our farrier, Kenny, whose primary job was as a gravedigger, started noticing that he was burying significantly more people than ever before compared with any time before. This agreed with what funeral directors like John O'Looney or our own Brenton Faithful (who has, since coming out, just receded into obscurity) who were brave enough to come forward as whistle-blowers.

For refusing to be vaccinated, Kenny, who worked outside and had minimal contact with anyone, was mandated out of his job. After the mandates were dropped he took out a grievance against his employer, the Wellington City Council and was paid out.

People who knew the truth and spoke it were to be punished and kept out of their professions. Of course, it is true that this has been implemented unevenly and some have been taken back. But not, from all the reports I've been seeing, in the professions I have mentioned.

For me, I have been living in a voluntary lockdown. Earlier on, that was because we were not allowed in restaurants or cafes (and had to buy takeaways), but in recent months for another reason.

There has been talk for a while amongst the tiny minority that are looking into this, of "shedding". There was a way in which the unvaccinated were having whatever was in the vaccine (spike proteins, or whatever) transmitted to them by the vaccinated.

There has been evidence recently, coming from people around the world, seeing strange shapes in the vaccines, as well as the blood of vaccinated and unvaccinated alike that some people are saying is nanotechnology. It is beyond the scope of this book to go into the details. If this is unfamiliar to you I suggest you go to the video platform, Rumble and look up two documentaries produced by Stew Peters- "*Died Suddenly*" and "*Final Days*". Despite some faults both these films are quite credible in the information they present.

Alternatively, you can go to my blog site, seemorerocks.is and search for the terms, 'vaccine injury', 'bioweapon' or 'nanotechnology'. All the proof is there if you take the time to look and will remain there until either it is taken down or the blog dies with me.

You see, I have this little prejudice.

I tend to take people who have been at the top of their profession and especially those who are using empirical evidence more seriously/ Rather than taking for granted what the "experts" are telling us while they talk down to us, I tend to listen to the voices of people who report what they are seeing under their microscopes, or those reporting what they are finding what is patents, or those who refer to what is in the Pfizer Papers, the results of research done by the corporate giant of the effects of the vaccine in the early days, This information was supposed to have remained sealed for 70 years but has been released in stages.

As I write this I am picking up indications that things are not at all what they were. People are not. I am finding that more and more people are getting sick and finding it difficult to throw sickness off; people are getting "covid" several times - all signs that people are losing their immunity. These are, of course, subjective impressions, but I am increasingly encountering people who are not functioning as they once were, and are not quite "the full quid".

I have been getting sicker and sicker over the months since Adern introduced her mass vaccination campaign. I have no objective metrics to confirm that, but it is obvious. In the summer, Pam brought something home, possibly after being among vaccinated friends (that is always a risk for us). We both tested positive for covid-19 in a RAT test and we both got sick. Pam shook it off with some difficulty but I didn't. I remained very sick for weeks with debilitating, but " mild" symptoms. Having finally caught "covid-19" it never felt like a respiratory condition and never went into my lower respiratory tract. It did, however, not respond to anything I threw at it including the *ivermectin* very kindly provided by some friends.

Eventually, the acute phase went away but I found that my general health deteriorated again.

Then, a few weeks ago I blew all caution to the wind and went into an electronics shop

without a mask. The first sign I ignored was when we were told THREE of the staff were away sick. The second was that the person serving us was coughing. Pam noticed, but I didn't and went away to get a face mask. Within a short time, I became sick once again. Once again, the acute stage eventually went away but I felt much worse even than after the first episode. Pam, with her intact immune system, seemed to have escaped this. However, going to see her craniosacral osteopath, Gerry, was told that his reading was that her immune system was on full alert. She has been sneezing constantly for many weeks now.

I have long contemplated how I am not vaccinated but can have symptoms that are LIKE covid-19. My suspicion has always been around shedding, but I have always kept direct exposure to a minimum. Usually, it is secondary with Pam getting around.

However, I have been seeing, up to now, anecdotal, or more accurately, empirical evidence of the unvaccinated being vulnerable to spread of nanotechnology or whatever is in the vials from the vaccinated. In particular, I had an insight when I heard the late Dr Rashid Buttar, who recently died under very suspicious circumstances, talk about "secondary inoculation", as distinct from "shedding", something that people with compromised immune systems are prone to.

He could have been talking about me!

Chapter 25 - An update

While writing this book, I was mercifully free of severe symptoms that might have prevented me from writing. Almost to the very day of me posting my first version of this book, I started to experience some serious symptoms.

I started to feel extreme urgency to urinate. When I tried to pass urine I found I could not pass more than a few drops and with great difficulty. I booked in to see my former lecturer in Chinese Medicine, Henry Su, who immediately identified it as a problem in the kidneys and prescribed me some Chinese herbs that are made into a decoction and drunk.

Very soon after taking the herbs, I felt a slight easing of the worst symptoms as the urinary retention largely passed. Instead, I started passing copious amounts of urine during the night.

I asked AI what the first signs of kidney disease were. The answer I got confirmed most of what I had already suspected. Of course, this is not the result of the delusions of Chat GPT; information comes from sources such as the Mayo Clinic:

"Here are some common symptoms that may indicate kidney problems:

"Changes in urination: Increased frequency of urination, especially during the night (nocturia), decreased urine output, presence of blood in the urine (hematuria), foamy or bubbly urine, or difficulty urinating."

In addition, the article mentioned other symptoms I have experienced, such as excessive fatigue, oedema or fluid retention, loss of appetite or nausea. It also mentioned high blood pressure, which, at least until recently, I did not have, along with muscle cramps and twitches.

Many of my current symptoms are there; others are not.

More than two years ago, when I first started to experience hot feet I searched on the internet. It couldn't have taken me more than a minute to find a possible link with kidney disease. The article I consulted said there was a possible link with high levels of *homocysteine*, an amino acid that is converted into other substances in the body through a process involving vitamins B6, B12, and other nutrients, and kidney disease.

I had earlier asked for blood tests for homocysteine levels, suggested by a naturopath. This was the only test of many the doctor refused to prescribe so I paid to have a test done independently. The results revealed elevated levels of *homocysteine*.

From an internet search:

"Elevated levels of homocysteine, known as hyperhomocysteinemia.... (have. been associated with various health conditions, including kidney disease"

The article went on to describe how elevated homocysteine levels can impact the kidneys and indeed even said that:

"Homocysteine can contribute to the development and progression of kidney damage"

But, as you will recall, Dr Hugh just waved all this aside and changed the subject.

I asked the AI if there is any known link between hot feet and kidney disease. The reply I got back confirmed that there is a possible link between hot feet and kidney disease"

The article says that this is not normally associated with kidney problems but that;

"Kidney disease can contribute to peripheral neuropathy, a condition characterised by nerve damage that can cause various sensations in the feet, including burning or tingling."

This is associated with the accumulation of toxins in the body when the kidneys are not functioning properly.

The most common cause is diabetes, which to my knowledge I do not have, besides which the signs and symptoms are incompatible. The most obvious association is with diabetes, but the good Dr Hugh ignored that as well. It does not take a genius to make the links and to order tests that may confirm that hypothesis.

So, there we have it. In my mind, as well as others, it points to a kidney problem. All of this appears to elude the medical centre that I am obligated to go to by law.

It would be interesting to know if I presented this information to them whether they would finally start taking me seriously or just continue going down a rabbit hole of *chronic fatigue syndrome*.

My paranoid mind tells me they have more or less decided to deny me any meaningful medical treatment, at least in the normal sense of the word, but are too dishonest to tell me and instead blame the patient. I suspect this has to do with covid.

As of writing, I have been given an appointment with another doctor at the Centre. It remains to be seen if I will be referred for blood tests or previous history to continue.

Logic would dictate....

Chapter 26 - The NZ Therapeutic Products Bill

It is time for me to sum up.

I wrote about my experiences with the medical industry, partially because I want to get my own story. It is also a nod to all the people who came to me 15 years ago and told me similar experiences of being denied proper treatment for their serious, chronic conditions

My personal story is also a microcosm of the corruption of medicine, everywhere in the western world, but particularly in New Zealand, which is leading in this rush to medical tyranny.

Instead of adhering to the "*first do no harm*" principle of the Hippocratic Oath all doctors take, and putting the interests of the patient at the apex, doctors are, either willingly, or "under duress", caving to all this to maintain their businesses and income.

In my mind, that is the very definition of corruption, both at the personal and corporate levels.

Dr Hugh and all his colleagues, with the exception of a very small number of doctors with conscience, are willing partners in this revolution

In terms of health, the *Therapeutic Products Bill*, has, as far as I know, already gone through a Select Committee phase, (how would I know because, as with every case where there is considerable public interest there is no scrutiny from New Zealand's "public-private" media), is one of the most dangerous pieces of legislation in New Zealand's history.

There have been two other attempts to introduce similar legislation in New Zealand, but this time round, in the words of the former Minister of Health in Jacinda Adern's government, Andrew Little, the government had "*learned the lessons*" from the past.

As I write this, I have little idea of what changes to the legislation would have been agreed to, but I suspect the essence of this legislation remains.

In short, the essence of the Bill, as I see it, is to introduce what is essentially an "*enabling act*" to put future decisions in the hands of a future unnamed "*regulator*" who can decide what "*therapeutic goods*" would be allowed after the industry pays "*administration fees*" to the government, sufficient to put natural products out of business.

That is essentially a ban on natural medicine without saying so, all cloaked in the language of "public safety" in an area where adverse effects are practically unknown.

In the words of Andrew Little in his public release:

"Consumers need to know the natural health products they're buying off the shelf are safe,"

If you had any doubt about the real reasons for the Bill, you should read the following words of the ex-Minister that, I am sure will be unknown to all but a tiny group of people in-the know.

"It enables New Zealand to take advantage of advances in medicine, such as cell and tissue therapies, emerging gene therapies, and the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning software. Having risk-proportionate approval systems will improve access to necessary and life-saving medicines, such as vaccines in a pandemic."

It is really about destroying the status quo as regards medicine and preparing the country for the Brave New World of "*emerging gene therapies, and the use of artificial intelligence and machine learning software*".

In other words, prepare yourself for more mRNA gene therapy and artificial intelligence.

Except, all of this is in secrecy and you will not be told about it.

Appendix: My communication with my Medical Centre

The following is my correspondence with Dr Hugh of my medical centre. I have omitted all names except for that of Dr. William Crawford.

To: Dr Hugh,

Over the summer period, the health condition I have had over the period I came to you with took a rapid turn for the worse. During that time I caught covid-19 (the second time I have had 'flu' in 15 years). I recovered from it relatively quickly but have had an aggravation of symptoms I have had for some years, so they cannot possibly be construed as "long covid" because they pre-existed.

These are the same symptoms I have reported since I first consulted you, but with an intensity that often keeps me bed bound for much of the day. They include:

- Extreme and constant exhaustion
- Nausea
- Dizziness on standing
- Chest pain that is quite distinct from gastric reflux
- Loss of memory and loss of cognitive function, as identified by Wellington Hospital
- Periodic shortness of breath

This was an introduction and IN NO WAY a "call for help". I was summing up the symptoms that have never been addressed.

For years I have brought an account of these symptoms to you without **once having had a discussion of what could be going on, or questions asked which would allow for a differential diagnosis to then decide what physical tests should be done.**

This is the essence

I wish to explain **why I have never returned for a consultation in the last 2 years** and it is clearly **NOT** because I had no health issues that needed your attention.

I came after seeing your junior doctor because I had started getting **burning feet** and altered sensations. I raised the findings of tests for homocysteine that I had done and paid for myself because your locum had refused them. I pointed out that low levels of homocysteine could be linked to serious conditions such as a higher risk of strokes or kidney disease. He suggested a consultation with you.

You have an unfortunate, and in my mind, ego-driven tendency to lecture or feedback to me on things that I already know or told you

When I explained my symptoms of tingling, burning feet you asked, as I recall, no questions about these or any other symptoms but tested my reflexes, which may or may not have had relevance in a diagnosis or may have provided something to put in my notes.

This was fobbing me off. I recently went to my podiatrist and got more sense from her in a few minutes than I got from you.

I recall that no questions were asked or any explanation offered as to what might be behind this. Instead, your main interest appeared to be to ask me and my partner Pam what our intention concerning “vaccination” was, even though Pam is not your patient.

This irritated me greatly.

From that moment I decided to forgo any further consultations as a fruitless exercise. **Two years later I still have the exact same symptoms.**

The last time I was referred to anyone was in 2016 when I was referred by Dr Crawford to the neurology department at Wellington Hospital where I received important tests of my physical and cognitive function. I later received a diagnosis of a condition called Parkinson’s Plus.

I have throughout rather expected that it is good practice to discuss the condition, recent tests etc but that has never happened. This is largely to provide some context to the situation and perhaps relieve some anxiety

However, I recall no reference to any of this but rather, “*What can I do for you today?*”, all delivered with an uncomfortable feeling of being fobbed off and not taken seriously, despite diagnoses of sarcoidosis and Parkinson’s. No questions, no referrals – nothing but endless generic tests that without a clinical context mean nothing if a serious diagnosis and treatment plan is what is in mind.

Why should I think this attitude is ever going to change?

One person who did want to talk about my blood tests was Dr Julie who wanted to discuss my blood tests despite having no knowledge of my clinical history, apart from the notes in front of her. The last thing she had done on a previous visit was to suggest an online survey that I am sure was designed to demonstrate that I was clinically depressed.

You may recall that she wrote in her contemporaneous notes that I was abusive and threatened her with my stick when the truth was nothing like that and I was being nothing more than emphatic although I did use the “f-word”, directed not at all at her but the suggestion of the use of an antihistamine as sleeping medicine. I am sure that the use of mistruths to justify one’s actions is not an example of high professionalism.

You will not be aware of another incident because I have never mentioned it.

For a while, I had consultations with Dr Erich. while Dr Crawford was away. He was, indeed, the most thorough in his consultation and told me that the basis of my condition was obesity and assured me my symptoms would improve 50 % if only I lost weight. On a subsequent visit, he was adamant I had sleep apnoea, something I found risible.

At the same stage, the question of my clinical notes from Dr Crawford's previous practice going missing in transit and the failure of anyone to try and track them down came up. In response to Dr Erich's irritation – "*How dare you accuse our receptionist?*" – my own anger must have shown itself by my saying I was contemplating taking a complaint to the Health and Disability Commissioner. His response I still recall as if it was yesterday: he said – "*what can I do to induce you not to take that course of action?*" and offered me a free treatment.

I declined the kind offer, went out to pay and while I was paying my bill Dr Erich rushed out to say he had a special fund.

This time I accepted his bribe.

This is an extremely serious accusation and something that should have been subject to disciplinary action. Yet you have chosen to ignore it.

Right at the beginning of my illness, I was fortunate to have a doctor who realised the seriousness of an acute flare-up of oedema and referred me immediately to the hospital. An exceptional doctor in A & E asked me many questions and did not give up until he had reached an interim diagnosis of sarcoidosis.

I am capable of gratitude where it is warranted

Other more mediocre doctors would have overlooked the seriousness of the situation and come to the conclusion that I was either suffering from depression (Dr Julie) or from sleep apnoea (Dr Erich).

That is in fact what has been allowed to develop into a serious, chronic illness. I hold this practice (with the possible exception of Dr Crawford, who tried his best), at least in part responsible for the situation I am in.

At no stage has anyone gone beyond the most routine of tests or taken my situation seriously. **The tests (such as routine blood tests) appear to me to be nothing more than expensive ways of throwing me off the scent and to demonstrate that nothing serious was amiss.**

It is common to ask what I would want from any negotiations. For me, it has gone beyond any forlorn hope of a positive clinical outcome. Rather, I would be looking for some honesty from you and an acknowledgment of two possible situations.

Take particular notice of this. Quite how you take this to be a "cry for help" is totally beyond me!

Either you are not sufficiently qualified to treat chronic conditions such as autoimmune diseases or chronic fatigue that go across several body systems, in which case you should have referred me to someone (if, indeed, they exist),

A second scenario is one whereby you follow a dogma that I believe is taught in medical schools (you can tell me if this is an urban myth), that if a condition is not self-limiting and if commonly-prescribed medical tests fail to come up with anything, it is regarded as psychosomatic – in the patient's head – something I believe is called **somatisation symptom disorder**.

I would really have liked an honest disclosure of what your true position is without hiding behind your position of "authority". I have a suspicion that you are going to regard me as a troublemaker and "suggest" I find another practitioner.

I have two answers to this.

First, as a patient, I have the right to raise serious areas of concern without threat of reprisal.

The second I can illustrate with an anecdote about Mullah Nasruddin, who was discovered sweating while he ate one hot chilli after another. When asked why he was doing this he said: "I am looking for a sweet one".

I have come to the conclusion that such subtlety is beyond you if you can't even understand things that are spelled out for you.

I have an appointment with you later this month. However, my health is too delicate to risk sitting in a waiting room, exposed to other very sick people so I hope you can find a way to accommodate this.

I look forward to a frank and honest discussion addressing what I have raised in this letter.

This is the only insincere comment from me – designed to cool things down. But you have used it to justify in your mind a completely fake and self-serving interpretation of my letter.

Thank you for your attention.

Yours sincerely,
Robin ..., Dip. Ac

DR HUGH'S LETTER

Dear Mr W,

You wrote to me on 25 January outlining your concerns about a number of symptoms you were experiencing and the lack of a unifying diagnosis to explain them. I got the sense that you were frustrated by this and sought a way forward.

I spent 3 hours on Waitangi weekend reviewing your notes in great detail and invited you to a consultation to discuss things further. I requested blood tests ahead of that consultation.

You contacted the practice on 13th February and were angry and hostile to the reception staff over the phone. You advised that you weren't prepared to do the tests without having an explanation as to why they were requested and that I speak to you about why I had ordered them first.

I rang you on the same day and you informed me that I was incompetent. You weren't willing to listen to me when I explained what could be going on to explain your symptoms and the rationale for the tests. You then informed me that you would be recording our impending consultation as evidence.

While you have the right to record your consultation, I feel it would change the dynamics of the consultation. I also feel that the anger and hostility you have directed at me, as well as your concerns about my incompetence, has irretrievably damaged the Doctor-Patient relationship. For there to be a good outcome there needs to be mutual trust between the Patient and Doctor, and it does not exist in our case. I would not feel comfortable being your doctor in future.

I had hoped that the one-hour consultation I had put aside to discuss your complaints, and possible diagnosis and further management, would help you. Ultimately, it is important that you get an accurate diagnosis for your long-term symptoms. Having reviewed your notes going back to 1998. I think you may have *Myalgic Encephalomyelitis*, also known as *Chronic Fatigue Syndrome* or more colloquially as "*Tapanui Flu*". I would have also have liked to refer you to a specialist geriatrician to further elucidate the diagnosis.

Because of the hostility I experienced in our telephone call, I suggest you see another doctor in the ...Medical Centre. They would be able to refer you as they saw fit to clarify the diagnosis.

Alternatively, there is Dr Rob, who practises medicine from an anthroposophic viewpoint. He is based in Masterton but has clinics in Lower Hutt at the ...Health Clinic at 37 Pretoria Street. You can text ... to make an appointment. His clinic is called; andhe may be a more congenial doctor for you.

Please let me know what you decide.

Dr Hugh...

MY RESPONSE

Dear Dr.Hugh,

I am responding to your letter paragraph-by-paragraph so I don't cherrypick and you don't misconstrue what I write.

You wrote to me on 25 January outlining your concerns about a number of symptoms you were experiencing and the lack of a unifying diagnosis to explain them. I got the sense that you were frustrated by this and sought a way forward.

As I tried to tell you yesterday I wrote to you about nothing of the sort. I mentioned a few symptoms by way of introduction and then I laid out what for me are serious allegations of malpractice.

There is nothing vague or confusing about my letter. My conclusion:

It is common to ask what I would want from any negotiations. For me, it has gone beyond any forlorn hope of a positive clinical outcome. Rather, I would be looking for some honesty from you and an acknowledgment of two possible situations.

Either you are not sufficiently qualified to treat chronic conditions such as autoimmune diseases or chronic fatigue that go across several body systems, in which case you should have referred me to someone (if, indeed, they exist),

A second scenario is one whereby you follow a dogma that I believe is taught in medical schools (you can tell me if this is an urban myth), that if a condition is not self-limiting and if commonly-prescribed medical tests fail to come up with anything, it is regarded as psychosomatic – in the patient's head – something I believe is called somatization symptom disorder.

It takes a certain type of person to misconstrue this as *getting "the sense that you were frustrated by this and sought a way forward."*

"I spent 3 hours on Waitangi weekend reviewing your notes in great detail and invited you to a consultation to discuss things further. "

Nobody asked you to spend your weekend reviewing my notes although, of course, you are welcome to do so.

I requested blood tests ahead of that consultation.

You were not entitled to do so without discussion and my informed consent - I was not informed, and I did not give my consent.

This is the second time this has happened in my life, both at your practice. I was summoned for an appointment in the absence of Dr Erich, I was rung a second time, told he wanted to discuss my blood results.

Of course, it was nothing of the sort: he wanted to lure me in to discuss the general aspects of my case.

I find this sort of practice unconscionable

You contacted the practice on 13th February and were angry and hostile to the reception staff over the phone. You advised that you weren't prepared to do the tests without having an explanation as to why they were requested and that I speak to you about why I had ordered them first.

I was angry at having blood tests ordered without my say-so.

I have not been to see you for TWO YEARS – you might care, in a moment of reflection, to ask why that may be.

I rang you on the same day and you informed me that I was incompetent. You weren't willing to listen to me when I explained what could be going on to explain your symptoms and the rationale for the tests.

You then informed me that you would be recording our impending consultation as evidence.

I announced I would be recording the session when you announced you would bring a “chaperone” with you.

While you have the right to record your consultation, I feel it would change the dynamics of the consultation.

You are right about that. I said it in response to you and because in your words you have misconstrued and misrepresented everything that I have said or written. I have little faith that anything you write up in your “contemporaneous” notes would be accurate.

I also feel that the anger and hostility you have directed at me, as well as your concerns about my incompetence, has irretrievably damaged the Doctor-Patient relationship.

Had I not been so triggered by what you are saying I would never have accused you of “incompetence”. Such strongly- held feelings are not directed at you by the System, which I despise.

For there to be a good outcome there needs to be mutual trust between the Patient and Doctor, and it does not exist in our case. I would not feel comfortable being your doctor in future.

I've certainly lost any trust in you and the System you represent, and that is reinforced by every interaction with you.

See below for my response.

I had hoped that the one-hour consultation I had put aside to discuss your complaints, and possible diagnosis and further management, would help you.

MY intention was never to discuss my 'complaints' but to discuss my letter.

It was never MY intention to raise my medical situation. The time for that has passed.

Ultimately, it is important that you get an accurate diagnosis for your long-term symptoms.

That's YOU, not me saying that.

Having reviewed your notes going back to 1998. I think you may have Myalgic Encephalomyelitis, also known as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome or more colloquially as

"Tapanui Flu". However, I would have also have liked to refer you to a specialist geriatrician to further elucidate the diagnosis.

I am unsure what you are trying to say.

When I was practising a decade or so ago, ME and attending conditions the entirety of the general medical community was in active denial that such a thing even existed. See my comments about "somatization symptom disorder" at the end of the letter.

It was practically my bread and butter.

Until you start dealing with the causes of ME, such as environmental toxins or latent viruses (where myalgic Encephalomyelitis comes from).

Without having an understanding of these things you don't have a hope in hell of treating it.

As you have come to this so late in the piece my guess is that I know more about the condition than you do.

If you think I am going to a GERIATRICIAN about this then you don't know me very well.

Because of the hostility I experienced in our telephone call, I suggest you see another doctor in the Connolly Street Medical Centre. They would be able to refer you as they saw fit to clarify the diagnosis. Alternatively, there is Dr Rob M, who practises medicine from an anthroposophic viewpoint. He is based in Masterton but has clinics in Lower Hutt at the ... Health Clinic at Pretoria Street. You can text ... to make an appointment. His clinic is called "Fresh Start Health Services" and he may be a more congenial doctor for you.

There is no way that I am going to look for another GP, as I pointed out in my letter.

First, as a patient, I have the right to raise serious areas of concern without threat of reprisal.

The second I can illustrate with an anecdote about Mullah Nasruddin, who was discovered sweating while he ate one hot chilli after another. When asked why he was doing this he said: "I am looking for a sweet one".

I have a sinking feeling that the subtlety of my second point might be too subtle. Basically, I am saying that I have no hope of finding another doctor. They are all far too busy and I suspect the ones I might have gone to have been mandated out of their practice by a corrupt Medical Council.

For what it is worth I will NEVER go to Mr. Rob – that would be a giant leap backwards, even from the status quo. I went to see Dr. Crawford, not for his anthroposophical medicine but for his knowledge, his caring and his respect and willingness to consult.

Please let me know what you decide.

I have not been to see you as a GP for the reasons I set out in my letter for the past 2 years.

Those 2 years, the covid “pandemic” notwithstanding, have been quite peaceful.

By contrast, every interaction with this medical centre has come with high degrees of stress and frustration.

The only reason I agreed to a consultation with you was to discuss the contents of my letter and to get an honest answer to my questions.

I can see that I am never going to get any honest response that is not self-serving. However, from our phone conversation yesterday I have as clear an answer as I am likely to get.

So, my response is:

I see no need to alter the status quo of the past two years. I shall not bother you further if you do not bother me.

By the same token, I will remain on your books as a purely formal matter.

The policy introduced in the early 2000s that requires me to register with a medical centre with no right to seek out the doctor best able to help me still sticks in my craw and as responsible for many evils

To ensure you get the message I shall repeat it:

I see no need to alter the status quo of the past two years. I shall not bother you further if you do not bother me.

By the same token, I will remain on your books as a purely formal matter.

Because you have misconstrued or ignored the entirety of my previous letter I am resending an annotated version to you.

**Best wishes,
Robin ... Dip. Ac, BA**

See if you can find a "cry for help" in these letters

POSTSCRIPT

“Thus saith the Lord; Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the Lord.

“For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited”.

—Jeremiah 17:5-6



In Wanganui during the Pandemic

It is now time for me to sum up.

The last 3-4 years have made me reconsider just about all my previous assumptions of previous years.

The first is climate change. I had been following Guy McPherson, probably the most pessimistic voice on climate change but had a sudden break with him after I started doing my own research into the state of the Arctic ice and seeking answers for what I was seeing in the skies above. It was a shocking eventuality that has come up time after time. But, it has allowed me to recognize the giant "*elephant in the sky*", geoengineering. It has allowed me to recognize that things are much more complicated than we are being told.

For one, having looked at the reality behind the UN biodiversity goals and Agenda- 2030, one has to then ask the serious questions, what is being done by organisations like the UN or the World Economic Forum in the name of saving the planet from man-made climate change. Pam, a little sceptical about claims being made, so she decided to look for herself. On examining UN Agenda-20 documents she found that one of the sustainability goals was mass vaccination.

What has that got to do with saving the planet from climate change? It is starting to look like eugenics. Perhaps the "*conspiracy theorists*" were correct after all?

I have observed that "*conspiracy theories*", which are at best inferences based on mostly-provable evidence, often have a habit, in time of becoming "*conspiracy facts*". Some social media memes ask what the difference is between "conspiracy theory" and fact. The answer is six months. I have noted, in the last 3 years, even the arch-conspiracy theorist, the much-maligned David Icke has been proven right in many of the most "outrageous" things he has had to say.

I have also made changes, spiritually. What past spiritual practices have done for me, including, primarily the realisation I had in Lucknow, India almost 30 years ago no longer serves me in this new age. It has given me a mostly quiet and receptive mind able to communicate with what I called Totality. But, paradoxically what is supposed to free the mind from the concept of the individual seems to still centre around the individual and his realisation.

I have looked at Eckhart Tolle, and Mooji, as representatives of the non-dual understanding and none of them has ever addressed what I regard as the main issues of the day - morality and the concept of Good vs. Evil. When I heard Eckhart Tolle answer a question about whether artificial intelligence can become aware he made a joke that the last time he looked into his iPhone it was not self-aware. To me, it sounded like the scorn materialists heap upon the faithful. It was a form of amorality that I once shared, thinking that once realisation came the right, moral behaviour would come automatically. I no longer think that's true.

As one teacher I know, a moral relativist once said, "*You can be enlightened and still have*

a shitty personality". You can certainly have a mindful thief or murderer. There is always a conceptual framework behind everything. I have,

In these dark times there definitely is something called Evil. It is not just an unenlightened or deluded mind. The same friend who is the moral relativist will, until this day, will, mainly using what I regard as sophistry, deny that Hitler was evil. Presumably because Evil doesn't exist.

But, even according to Advaita Vedanta teacher, Ramesh Balsekar, there is a difference between polarities (which exist) and dualism.

The problem with a dualistic concept of Good vs Evil lies in where we place the dividing line. It implies that I can say *"I am good, but you are evil"*.

The great Russian writer and moralist Alexander Solzhenitsyn lays out the problem best for me in his work, *the Gulag Archipelago*:

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

So, Evil exists and it is very palpable. Perhaps, how Christianity gets around the problem by making a distinction between Sin and Evil. We are all sinners, through our fallen nature, but not all of us are evil. For instance, Vladimir Putin is a sinner. He is probably not a "good man". He may be a bad man, even, arguably a very bad man. What he is not, however, is evil.

I have left much of the past, my old assumptions behind but not rejected it. I just recognize the limitations, especially now. The eastern traditions just don't measure up for me, now. The people I most admire are all committed Christians or at least very spiritual people.

I have spent many months searching my soul and have, with help from one dear friend in particular, come to the realisation that I am Christian and do have a direct relationship with Jesus as Saviour.

It is, however not the Christianity meant by fundamentalists but it is far, far away from what the modern churches teach. Just from my limited knowledge of the New Testament, I have seen clearly, say from John 3, that Jesus said we need to be born again to be saved.

"Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God"
— (John 3:3).

To me, that implies a direct relationship with Jesus, not a mediated one, through Pope, priest or pastor. The Bible is not all about love but is primarily about spiritual warfare, Good vs Evil.

I firmly believe that Jesus was God's Son and Savior. But, there are many roads to Jesus. I do believe the New Testament is the inspired Word of God, but do I believe literally that Noah saved God's Creation in an Ark during the Flood or that Jesus was physically lifted up to Heaven, a place in the sky.? Possibly not so much.

I believe that the Church Fathers received the direct word of God just as people today can receive direct messages from the Holy Spirit. But the messages are delivered through the receiving apparatus, the human mind in a form that is recognizable to the individual. It is therefore mythology, not in the common materialist sense of something that is "made-up" but in the positive sense of Joseph Campbell who defined myth as stories that help humans through life. Another person who comes to mind is someone who definitely believed in God and the Afterlife - Carl Gustav Jung and his "*Collective Unconscious*".

This may all well be regarded as heresy, but so be it. I have always had an independent approach, so am not going off to join a church or any other organisation. If there was anyone in dereliction it is churches, all of them. If I was going to join a church it would probably be the Orthodox church which does not appear to have sacrificed its central teachings and is probably, now, the closest to the original teachings of Christ. They have not turned to apostasy.

Along with the Catholics, the Anglicans and other mainstream churches, I reject the concepts that have infected most of the evangelical, Protestant churches of dispensationalism and the Rapture. The idea of some sort of Zionist church is enough to send me running as far as I can.

However, I am a newbie and a work-in-progress.

I have spent 13 years running my blog which has largely been a warning to people of what is coming. I have been somewhat of a prophet of doom. Now the future is upon us and we are living the consequences.

As I write this we stand on the precipice of great change that all has the potential to significantly reduce the world's population and to reduce those that remain to transhuman slaves. This would be the end of the species, *homo sapiens* as we have known.

In the meantime, everything that has acted as the glue for, at least the western world is falling apart. Economies are collapsing and lifestyles are being destroyed. All the while, we are being told that the opposite is true.

I have unstintingly put all my energy for the past 12 years into warning people of what I saw as the greatest dangers at the time. In terms of warning people and "*doing the news*" I have lost much of my drive.

I will, of course, continue to be loyal to my regular readers but as far as what I have been doing every day for 13 years I'm done.

I have decided, in the face of all this, to put my own soul and the Collective Spirit of humanity first.

I need to give time to myself.

